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VINCENZO BELLINI

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VINCENZO BELLINI

I

EARLY YEARS

THERE must surely be something in the environment of Catania conducive to musical genius!

It can hardly be the sea, nor yet the blue sky, for that is common to all Sicily, nor does the close proximity of Mount Etna seem specially suggestive. But whatever the reason may be, the few years that closed the eighteenth and ushered in the nineteenth century beheld Catania giving Italy three famous musicians, two of whom can be ranked among her greatest, Giovanni Pacini, born in 1796, and Vincenzo Bellini, born in 1801. The

third, Antonio Coppola (1792-1877), though he had not the genius that would have enabled his works to survive the changes of fashion and taste—those arbitrary scythes which lay low flowers and weeds indiscriminately and without judgment—yet put forth some sweet and charming music. He was not, however, born at Catania, but was taken to live there while still an infant in arms.

Bellini did not belong to an old Sicilian family, though he was still a southerner of southerners, as his grandfather, Vincenzo, came from the Abruzzi. He too was a musician, and studied at Naples under Piccini. His compositions (which include an oratorio) were soon forgotten, if indeed they ever achieved any temporary distinction, and were it not for the fact that his grandson attained great fame, we should probably never have heard of him. He did not remain in Italy, and having moved to Sicily, married a lady called Michaela Burzi and settled in Catania.

Of his five children the eldest, Rosario, inherited some talent for his father's Art, and

resolved to make it his profession. What studies he completed we do not know, but he became organist at one of the churches in Catania, and earned what he could in addition by giving lessons. In January, 1801, he married a lady called Agata Ferlito, who is said to have been very cultivated, well read, and fond of music, and on November 1st of the same year their eldest son was born and named Vincenzo.

Six other children were born to them, three sons and three daughters, but they in no way concern us, save that they were the brothers and sisters of Vincenzo. In him the hereditary talent showed itself early, indeed as a prodigy he seems in his early years almost to eclipse Mozart or Mendelssohn; the stories concerning him are just as wonderful and, for the most part, equally improbable. When he was twenty months old he is said to have sung an air by Fioraventi, his father accompanying him on the piano, and when he was three years of age he was allowed to conduct a mass in the Capuchin church, in which his beat is reported to have been clear and firm! The reader must decide for himself the

probable truth of these stories; but it is certain that at a very early age he showed a decided bent for music.

Musicians have frequently had much difficulty in persuading their parents to allow them to follow their natural and congenial occupation, and have had in early years to resort to subterfuges in order to pursue their studies, and we find varying opinions on this head concerning Bellini. The truth one would fancy to be that though at first his parents were pleased enough with his early show of talent, when they realised that with him music was likely to become an all-absorbing pursuit, their attitude somewhat underwent a change, and instead of encouragement he received the reverse, for Rosario had found that unless a man be possessed of real genius, success is not easily attained, and they did not wish their firstborn to follow so unprofitable a pursuit.

But Art was not to be denied her follower—though he was then but a diminutive one—and he had at a very early age enough wisdom to perceive that his grandfather might give

him what his father denied, and accordingly he seems to have received some lessons clandestinely. The truth came out at last of course, and Rosario and Agata realising that it was useless to try and check Music having her own way, resolved very sensibly that as it was evidently to be Vincenzo's calling, he had better study it as thoroughly as possible, and the first regular lessons he received were from his father.

By the time he was five he had considerable execution on the piano for one so young, and before he was six he commenced composing. When he attained the latter age it was considered time that his ordinary education should begin, and a certain Innocenzo Fulci was engaged to teach him his own language, Latin, and other branches of general learning. The master and pupil seem to have had considerable affection for each other, at least if we may judge so from the fact that the small musician while in his seventh year set to music one of the poems he had learnt in his lessons, and dedicated it to his instructor. Truly the best offering he could give!

Before he was eight he had written two settings of the "*Tantum Ergo*," one of which was considered of sufficient merit to be performed in the Church of San Michele Maggiore—probably the Church at which his father was organist — and in the next few years he composed two Masses with Vespers, several cantatas, and many romances and Sicilian *Canzoni.*

The records of his boyhood are scanty, and there is no reason to suppose that it differed much from that of anyone else except as regards his genius for music. He was always of a studious disposition, and worked hard at his Art and general education, and when old enough attended the lectures at the University.

He seems to have been very happy in his home, to have loved his parents dearly, and to have had many friends, for at all times his charming character won the hearts of everyone with whom he came in contact. He was quiet and reserved to all but his few intimates, thoughtful and rather melancholy, for while still in his teens moods of depression would steal over him for no apparent reason, which

increased as he grew older, and to which even the success of his operas could do no more than effect a temporary banishment. Like most Italians, especially Sicilians, he was highly superstitious, and had the true southern warmth of heart, which prompted him to many a kind action.

In the year 1818 he composed a "*Scena ed aria di Cerere*" for soprano and orchestra, but his best work up to the time he left Sicily was a "*Salve Regina*" for bass voice with bassoon obligato and orchestra (the orchestra scored for strings, two flutes, oboes, clarionets, horns and bassoons, including the obligato instrument), and considering that students of seventeen years of age are as a rule bent on imitating some composer whom they happen to particularly admire for the time being, this work is singularly matured in manner. That it is quite in his customary vein cannot be asserted, for he was essentially an operatic writer, and the "*Salve Regina*" is sacred in reality as well as intention, a spirit of quiet devotion running throughout; indeed it would be far more effective if sung in

a church than elsewhere. But it bears a strong impress of the same individuality that stamps some of his most successful music; there is the same tender melancholy and dreamy expression, the same beauty and softness of melody. It seems to indicate that his father and grandfather—for we cannot but think that the pupil of the great Picini must have had a considerable share in his grandson's instruction—had brought him up largely on the old Italian church music, for there are traces of that style in the composition. The orchestra is delicate, and the only technical feature which calls for notice is the relation of the voice to the obligato instrument, which more than once takes the form of a canon. The music shows that at this period of his life he had already divined the art of writing appropriately for the voice, and that he was above all a poet.

Rosario now thought that his son had learnt all he was likely to learn in Catania and that it was necessary for his musical training that he should pursue his musical studies farther afield. He was, however,

anything but a rich man, and as he had a large family to support he could not afford unaided to send Vincenzo to Italy. So he asked the Intendant of Catania, the Duke of Sammartino, to obtain a grant from the communal treasury which would enable Vincenzo to study at Naples. The Duchess, who knew and took an interest in the young musician, added her prayers, and so the Duke in his turn petitioned Prince Pardo, the "Signor Patrizio," and on 5th May, 1819, a pension was granted him for four years to enable him to study at the Academy at Naples. So much to his delight he packed his bags and set out.

As he had letters of introduction to various Neapolitan families, and also to the Duke of Noja, the governor of the Conservatoire, he knew he would not be friendless on his first plunge into the world. But the home circle is not easily replaced, especially when, as in Bellini's case, there is deep love and sympathy between father, mother, and children, and, in spite of his joy at the prospect of his

sojourn at Naples, he could not feel otherwise than somewhat sad at leaving his parents and Sicilian friends.

When he returned he was on the threshold of his career, so short and so brilliant; he had also suffered the only real blow he ever encountered — his unhappy love affair, the effects of which he never thoroughly threw off.

II

A REVIEW OF THE ITALIAN OPERA OF THE PERIOD

BEFORE considering in detail Bellini's stay at the "Reale Collegio" it will be as well to review briefly the condition of opera in Italy at the date he went to Naples.

In order to get a better understanding of the subject we must retrace our steps the best part of fifty years, to the last quarter of the eighteenth century. Italy then had many gifted musicians, but not of the first water, and their work lacked those qualities which would have caused it to survive the changes of fashion. Their names are forgotten and rarely met with save in musical histories and dictionaries. The names of two composers, however, have survived, and so in some measure

have their works, for their operas are still played occasionally at long intervals: Domenico Cimarosa and Giovanni Paisiello were the two leading composers of the period and therefore those that influenced Italy the most.

Paisiello was born in 1741. He soon made his reputation, and produced operas all over Europe from Paris to St Petersburg, and died in 1816.

Cimarosa was born in 1749. He also acquired his reputation early; like Paisiello again he was for some years attached to the Russian Court, and until the later years of his life seems hardly to have suffered a reverse or a check; but like another great Italian, Verdi, he was a patriot. But Cimarosa belonged to a more unfortunate period of Italian history, and loving one's country at that time usually meant being an enemy of the Government, so he was carried off to the Neapolitan dungeons, where for nearly two years he was kept in close confinement. He was at length released, but died shortly afterwards at Venice in 1801, his health having

been completely shattered by the privations he endured while in prison.

These two men may be considered as having finished their careers at the close of the eighteenth century; for though Paisiello lived some sixteen years longer, the greater part of that time was spent in comparative retirement. They cannot be said to have founded a school. Their influence did not extend much beyond their immediate successors—their contemporaries who outlived them; they may rather be regarded as having summed up and brought to perfection in their works the aims and ideals of Pergolesi, Picini, and the other Italian composers of that school. They were the last and perhaps the greatest representatives in Italy of the so-called classical period.

They both received their musical training at a time when Italy was undoubtedly the country best fitted to give instruction in the technicalities of the art. Like Mozart they made thorough studies of all its branches. In their flow of melody, variety, and imagination they far exceeded any Italian up to that time, with

the possible exception of Picini, or Pergolesi, who died before his powers were fully matured. Though they did not equal Mozart in their handling of the orchestra they did much to increase its importance in Italy; by them many new instruments were introduced or brought into prominence, and it was generally made infinitely more attractive than before. To Paisiello also belongs the honour of having been one of the first to bring the act finale into greater importance. Like most Italians—Bellini and Verdi being noticeable exceptions*—they were successful in both serious and comic opera; though Paisiello's greatest work, or at any rate his work that lived the longest, was in that particular type of opera which is not genuinely tragic nor yet comic: his "Nina, La pazza per Amore" kept the stage long after the fashion had changed.

Cimarosa perhaps achieved his greatest success

* It must, however, be remembered that Verdi's last, and, as some think, greatest work was comic. Still this is the only work not of a tragic nature that he wrote; his second opera—a failure—being left out of count owing to the circumstances under which it was written.

in the buffo style. The "Matrimonio Segreto" has never been equalled save by Mozart and Rossini; it has a charm which, were we allowed to hear it again in this country, would be found to have increased and not waned with age. Concerning his best serious work, "Gli Orazi," an able critic says:—

"The music is full of noble simplicity, beautiful melody, and strong expression. In the airs dramatic truth is never sacrificed to vocal display, and the concerted pieces are grand, broad, and effective. . . . It wants nothing but an orchestra of greater fulness and variety to satisfy the modern ear."

The music of these two composers is beautiful, unaffected, and sincere. Their general style is like Mozart's (especially with Cimarosa, the greatest of the two), but simpler.

Up to that time the music of the different nationalities was not divided by a very sharp line, the difference being more one of temperament than of technique, of form, or of style. But the year 1800 may be regarded as significant of a change; after that date the various countries

began to drift farther apart in their music, and —speaking very broadly—the classical school and feeling gave place to the romantic.

The beginnings of a new movement are always hard to trace, for if the movement be spontaneous it grows naturally — though not necessarily beneficially — out of what has immediately preceded it owing to causes and impulses which are confined, not to the art itself (if it be an art movement), but are common to the general condition of the country, or countries, in which it originates. If it be not spontaneous, but set in motion by a limited circle, a coterie, as was the pre-Raphaelite movement, although it may have a certain influence on art for good or bad, as that movement undoubtedly had, it will expire before any considerable time has elapsed. A new movement, if it be genuine, can never be ascribed to any single person or clique; it is "in the air," though it may be that it affects some more than others, and gathers strength almost unnoticed until a definite and decided blow is struck.

In operatic music it will not be far wrong

to say that the first definite realisation of romanticism came from Vienna, when in 1805 Beethoven produced his great opera. There is a vast difference between "Fidelio" and Mozart's last operas, though the years that separate them are comparatively few,—though some authorities seem inclined to place—and wrongly, in the opinion of the present writer—Gluck's "Armide" among the category of romantic works. At the outset of the nineteenth century indications were felt in France of the coming change, but in Italy, the only country with which we are here concerned, it was not until "Il Tancredi" was produced at Venice in 1813 that it could be said the Italian school had entered the new movement.

To explain exactly wherein romanticism differs from classicism is no easy task, and, were it attempted, would occupy space out of proportion to the rest of this chapter, but two of its attributes, perhaps its chief ones, and certainly those which are most in evidence in the music—and we are only considering the music—of the Rossini-Bellini-Donizetti period,

must be mentioned: the discarding of restraint in expression and a somewhat similar treatment of the musical forms of their predecessors. In the old classical operas of Cimarosa and others there is always a certain calm dignity in the expression — not that it lacks force, on the contrary it often gains by it. However intense the undercurrent of feeling may be, the surface is comparatively smooth and regular. Regular, too, were the musical forms and their development into which an opera was divided.

But that the Italians in their emancipation from restraint "tore passion to tatters," or heralded in any way the present-day vogue of formless music, must not be thought for a moment. Different as is the expression of the Rossini period from that of Cimarosa, it still less resembles the realistic expression of to-day, and the old forms were not so much abandoned as modified and made more elastic. So in consequence we find the most romantic stories, such as "La Donna del Lago," "Lucia di Lammermoor," and even an opera of a considerably later date, "Il Trovatore," treated with a careful regard to

form—of its sort; and on the other hand subjects like "Semiramide"—for the old favourite stories died hard—treated with a freedom which belongs more to the romantic school. These few suggestions may help the reader to realise the qualities that separate "Il Tancredi" from its predecessors. But we must now retrace our steps somewhat.

The chief Italian composers when Paisiello and Cimarosa left the field clear were Paer, Zingarelli, and Meyer. Zingarelli and Meyer may be considered as belonging entirely to the classical school. Their operas, though popular in their day and containing much that is beautiful, had, excepting two works to be mentioned, no very long life. Their best works were "Romeo e Guilietta" and "Medea" respectively. But Paer, the greatest of the three, in spite of the fact that he must be counted as ranking with the old order, sometimes showed a decided foreshadowing of the new movement. His instrumentation was then novel, and there was a whisper in his music of Rossini's melodic phrases, his forms and his effects. Compare his operas, "Sophonisba"

and "Sargino," to "Tancredi," and this is very plain. The ground that he worked on was the old ground, but temperamentally he was somewhat in sympathy with the beginnings of the new movement, though only with its beginnings, for he lived to see some of its development and was not pleased. It remained for Rossini to give the decisive impetus to Italian opera. All was ready for it.

Gioacchino Rossini was born in 1791 at Pesaro, where his father was town trumpeter and inspector of slaughter-houses. The elder Rossini added horn-playing to his other pursuits; he taught his son the instrument, and together they used to play in the orchestra when any itinerant opera troupe visited the town. After studying music under masters more or less incompetent, he entered in 1807 the Lyceum at Bologna, where he remained till 1810. He then wandered over Italy, writing comic operas and operettas, mostly for the minor theatres, and all the while acquiring a reputation as a promising composer, till in 1813 he produced "Il Tancredi" at Venice. From that

day forth his career was assured, and so great was the weight of his genius that he largely transformed Italian music, considerably influenced French, and had some effect on German—for the time being.

The place that he holds in music has been much disputed. On the one hand he is looked on as the Italian who first disregarded the importance of technique, who, deficient in it himself, set the example for a worse state of things in his followers, who lazily wrote brilliant but empty music to suit an idle audience and vain singers. That is one view of "Jove" Rossini. On the other hand—and this is nearer the mark—he is regarded as an innovator who brought beauty, variety, and imagination into Italian opera such as had never been known before.

He gave us the key to his own position in the matter of technique when he said: "I should have had a taste for cultivating the strict forms of music if a master able to explain the reason of the rules had taught me counterpoint, but when I asked Mattei for information he always

responded, 'It is the custom to write thus.' He disgusted me with a science which had no good reason to give for the things it taught." Rossini was willing to abide by the rules so long as they helped him, but as soon as they hindered him from expressing his ideas he threw them over. Like the Sabbath they were made for man, and Rossini saw no reason why the correct order should get inverted.

His technique was more than sufficient for his ends, and his ends were such as made a considerable use of technique. He had not perhaps the same mastery of the strict forms of music as had Mozart or Cimarosa, but he was a complete master of that side of the technique of his art which it suited his purpose to cultivate. His combinations show more fancy and variety than those of any other Italian up to his time; he depended more on harmony than his predecessors, and in the matter of orchestration he undoubtedly set an example to the whole operatic world. For fancy, variety, and simple effectiveness—to say nothing of originality—his use of the orchestra has never

been surpassed. It is at times highly majestic and grandiose, and never in his works do we find those instrumental exaggerations which disfigure so much of the music that has come after him. Nothing shows so completely his mastery over both voice and orchestra as the admirable way in which he could combine them. Let one example be given, an example from "Il Barbiere" that most readers of this book may perhaps know: "That explosion of gaiety, that Homeric laughter, the piccolos screaming, the clarionets roaring, the double-basses even chuckling, when that chorus in G enters—a fire-work of fun, an avalanche of hilarity."* Here it is difficult to know which to admire most —the treatment of the orchestra which spurs or eggs on the musicians to pay their ill-timed and "damnably reiterated" thanks to Count Almaviva or the vocal part of the score which actually does it.

Whether or not he is the greatest of the Italian composers this is not the place to discuss; but surely he is the most versatile operatic writer

* From Engel's "Mozart to Mario."

that any country has produced. If his operas are studied as a series one cannot help being struck by the variety displayed in them. In some, as in "Matilda di Shabran," where the dramatic aspect is somewhat subjugated in order to obtain greater musical brilliancy, the effect is resistless.* In others again he would write music which combines at once the most florid style of singing with the utmost dramatic expression. If anyone doubts this let him look into the score of "Otello." In opera buffo he has never been excelled; though lacking at times that clear, joyous merriment which distinguishes Cimarosa, and though occasionally they have not the exquisite finish Mozart displays, his comic operas have a brilliancy, a sense of humour and wit never shown before or since in music. In one way he is curious; no composer had so many mannerisms or used them with such persistency —so much so as to suggest that occasionally he would use one of his favourite forms in order to

* So much so that in the opera mentioned after the first act its admirers and detractors adjourned outside the theatre and fought the question out with their canes. The Rossinians won. Paganini, by the way, was the conductor.

save himself trouble, but no composer was as ready as Rossini to throw over these peculiar traits when the occasion seemed to demand it. At times he would write movements absolutely free from any mannerism and quite unlike his usual work, though still clearly showing his individuality. This habit grew on him as years advanced, and we can trace a steady development from "Il Tancredi" to "Otello," "La Donna del Lago" to "Semiramide," and thence to his French operas, in the last of which, "William Tell," he attained a height which, like Beethoven's C minor symphony, rises above the limitations of periods and schools and stands a perfect work for all time and every country.

But it is with Rossini's Italian career that we are concerned, and though he had not, at the time Bellini went to Naples, written the last and in some ways the greatest of his Italian works, "Zelmira" and "Semiramide," still its influence was making itself felt on other composers. The firm position in which his music soon established itself made a continuation of the old state of affairs impossible.

Despite the charm and the directness of the appeal of the pre-Rossinian school, his superior flow of melody, his brilliant instrumentation, and above all his irresistible vivacity made it imperative for composers who wished to get a hearing to emulate some of these qualities as best they could. They might, if they chose, write music as he did, which would reveal stronger and more sterling qualities the more it was heard and studied, but firstly it was necessary to make the surface of such attractive quality that it could not be passed by.

Of course influence of this kind had both its good and bad sides. The bad side is very obvious: composers of small genius in imitating Rossini copied only his superficial qualities, imitated his mannerisms, never looked beneath the surface, and produced none of his virtues—and in some cases none of their own. As Mendelssohn said of the imitators of Beethoven: "They clear their throats as he did and cough his cough, but that is as far as they get," so there were composers who copied Rossini's florid vocal writing, but never wrote great dramatic

movements as he did, who imitated him in making the orchestra support and explain without as a rule superseding the voice, but who could not rise to an occasion and write important orchestral numbers, and who never in any way attained to the brilliancy he possessed. In fact their music, being nothing more than a copy, generally a pale copy, of his mannerisms, became empty and shallow, and in consequence had no long life—nor deserved it.

However, the good side of his influence was as bright as the other was the reverse—for those who could rightly appreciate it. It taught them a freedom of dramatic expression which has resulted in such masterpieces as the last act of "La Favorita," and that this dramatic writing was in no way incompatible with the most florid school of singing, a wealth of rhythm was opened up before undreamed of, an opportunity for studying style was afforded such as the works of no other composer presented, and in his instrumentation there was a magnificent example to be followed.

But many of the orchestras then were not very good; they would in no way tempt a

composer to lay himself out for them, whereas on the other hand the singers were excellent—when have they since been equalled?—and so the tendency of the day, helped by a certain national predilection for vocal music, was not to follow up the path that Rossini had opened out in the matter of orchestral music, but to treat it in a manner which, though it cannot be termed neglect, was yet not at all enterprising; indeed it was not till the days when Signor Boito appeared and Verdi entered on his later manner, that the orchestra recovered the importance in Italian opera that Rossini had assigned to it.*

Of course this movement did not at once make itself felt in the conservatoires. These institutions were presided over by professors who

* In justice to Donizetti some mention should be made of the orchestral portions of his scores, more especially as at the present day that side of his work receives but scant courtesy. But surely it is only necessary to recall "La Favorita," with its splendid overture, or the lesser known "Don Sebastian," to perceive the great beauty of his scoring. Let another example be given, one better known to most readers: "Lucia." Most beautiful is the treatment of the orchestra, especially throughout the entire first act and the great finale, the contract scene, in the second act.

had made their mark before Rossini sprang into fame, and who were often antagonistic to his music and its tendencies, both good and bad. It was not till the next generation that the teaching in any way changed, and when Bellini went to Naples the same education could be given as fifty years previously, supposing the student were willing to receive it; in fact it may greatly be doubted whether the teaching in the principal schools ever declined as much as some historians make out. But that there was on the whole a serious falling off in the technique of Italian musicians cannot be denied, and it will not be far wrong if it is said that the blame lay not at the doors of the colleges—over which such musicians as Zingarelli and Meyer presided—so much as with the students, who were completely seduced by Rossini's resistless strains. All Italy and most of Europe was intoxicated with his music, and it could hardly be expected that students—a class always rather impatient of restraint at the best of times—could withstand these attractions. And the consequence

was that as the inventive faculty plays a higher part in Rossini's operas, especially his early Italian ones, than technical skill — though the latter is anything but lacking—and as at that time a wave was passing over art, which in its good side left the imagination less fettered, but which in its bad side encouraged the throwing over of all academic restraint, heedless of the responsibilities thus entailed, many students, fancying themselves extremely clever —as students generally do—and believing they were possessed of quite enough technical skill to express their own precious ideas, left the conservatoires before their training was half completed, and became the authors in a great many cases of the shallow and insipid works before alluded to. On the other hand musicians such as Donizetti and Mercadante stayed and studied hard and zealously. They did not, perhaps, make so thorough and complete a study as the older generation had done; they devoted their energies more to such channels as would best fit them for the path they intended to follow. For Italian music of that date was

very largely operatic. They had technique quite sufficient for their ends and to spare, the comparative simplicity of their music being due to the expression of their temperament and not to any technical necessity.

The reader will now be able to gauge the general movement in Italian music at the commencement of Bellini's career. It must however be remembered that Bellini and his contemporaries followed so close on Rossini that this state of affairs was hardly so much in evidence then as ten or twelve years later. But even then the change was being felt, and we may take it that Bellini was subjected to influences good and bad, as laid down above.

III

NAPLES

"VOILA donc Bellini à Naples!" as Pougin says. If environment and tradition can have any influence, Naples should surely be the ideal place of a student! In the eighteenth century it was the centre of the most important school of Italian composers, and when Bellini went there its brilliancy had diminished but little. Rossini was still the musical director of the San Carlo Theatre, Zingarelli was the head of the Conservatoire, Tritto one of the professors, and the learned Raimondi, the complexity of whose music is so great that Fétis remarks it is enough to give the reader a headache, then dwelt in the town. It may be doubted, too, whether any college, with the possible exception of the Paris Conservatoire,

can show so long a list of celebrated pupils and professors as that of Naples. Connected with it at one time or another—or rather with the various academies which, when amalgamated, became the Reale Collegio—were Alessandro Scarlatti, Durante, Leo, Feo, Porporo, Traetta, Jommelli, Sacchini, Piccini, Paisiello, Coccia, etc., etc., and every incentive to work was present when Bellini entered, for it contained a singularly large number of gifted pupils. Mercadante, who afterwards became the Principal and ably carried on its traditions, was one of the *Maestrini* or sub-professors. There also were Luigi Ricci, Carlo Conti, Costa, and later on Petrella and Fredrico Ricci. Talent in Naples just then seemed the order of the day.

Bellini presented his letters to the Duke of Noja and Zingarelli, and after having passed with great success an examination as to his abilities, entered the counterpoint class presided over by Tritto. He soon felt at home; the spot was lovely—lovelier even than his native Catania. The smoking mountain near must

have had an air of familiarity, and he made many friends with the Neapolitans—amongst others with the Fumaroli family, of whom more anon—for his charming character and beautiful manners made him a favourite everywhere. With the students he was always popular, and first among his many friends in the Collegio was Francesco Florimo—it was his mother and Florimo that he constantly asked to see as he lay dying at Puteaux.

His life was very uneventful. He worked hard at his counterpoint, and seems also to have studied various instruments, but never for long, as his whole bent was for composition, and to that end he devoted his best energies. Shortly after entering the college he composed a "*Tecum Principium*" for soprano and orchestra, and in 1820 a "*Tantum Ergo.*" He also wrote many instrumental pieces for his fellow-students. In 1821 he left Tritto's class and entered Zingarelli's, and his compositions now followed one another rapidly. Everything he wrote was closely scrutinised by his master, who, by the way, was no lover of the new

style of music, and if ever a trace of Rossini was to be found in these compositions, woe betide him!—but the traces appeared occasionally nevertheless.

During the next two or three years Bellini worked at the usual exercises which students are put through, and of his compositions that have survived, by name or otherwise, must be mentioned an oboe concerto, more than one "*Sinfonia*"—which, needless to say, probably implies no more than an overture in the operatic style, for symphonic development was never a branch of art much cultivated by him—a couple of masses, and at least four more settings of the "*Tantum Ergo*" for various voices and combinations of voices and orchestra. These latter are hardly more than very necessary but rather uninteresting exercises, and the orchestra generally consists but of strings, horns, and bassoons.

After a time he became a *Maestrino* and eventually *Primo Maestrino*, and it fell to his lot to teach, among others, Errico Petrella. Between him and old Zingarelli there was

genuine affection, the latter regarding him almost as a son—an intimacy greatly to Bellini's advantage. He was very popular with everyone, indeed his fellow-students seem to have felt a respect and admiration for him which must have resembled that described as felt for Mendelssohn in the queer but fascinating book, "Charles Auchester."

It is always interesting to know what works a genius studied when young, to know in what then lay his ideal—though sometimes it seems in direct contradiction to the work produced in later life. For who, on hearing Berlioz' music, would suspect that as a student he adored above all Gluck? In Bellini's case one may be sure Zingarelli would lead him to the pure classical fountain whence his own inspirations were derived, and so we find the Sicilian making careful studies of the great Italians of the eighteenth century. The works of Leo, Durante, Jommelli, Piccini, Cimarosa, and, above all, Pergolesi, became his familiar friends; to judge from his first opera one would fancy Clementi's

music known to him, and "Bianca e Fernando" shows that he was familiar with some of Beethoven's sonatas, though he never heard the immortal symphonies till he went to Paris. But his education was not confined solely to the Collegio. There was the San Carlo, and with his fellow-students he attended the performances as often as possible, hearing there much that he was forbidden to study and practise in the school. Like most young Italians of the day, he was completely captivated by Rossini's music. For him Rossini was the greatest of all; "Il Maestro di Maestri" was the name he bestowed on him. "Italiana in Algeria" was his favourite comic work—not "Il Barbiere" strangely enough—and in serious music he placed nothing above "Semiramide," a work that seemed to him to attain a height he could never hope to reach. One evening he was walking back to his rooms with some of the students after a performance of this opera and they were discussing the work. Some liked one part best, some another, when Bellini—then *Primo Maestrino* (for it was shortly before he left the institution)—stopped and said:

"Do you know what I think about it? It makes me feel as if it was useless for us to try and achieve anything."

In 1824 he made the acquaintance of Donizetti and Pacini, who had both commenced their careers a few years earlier. They became firm friends, and it may well have been their example and Rossini's music that awoke in him the passion for dramatic composition. It is an instinct in almost every Italian composer. Zingarelli was certainly a very suitable master. He made it certain that Bellini would avoid the exaggeration into which those commencing art so often fall. A sweet simplicity and a calm dignity was the keynote of Zingarelli's music, but the times had changed. "Jove" Rossini could not only play with fire but subdue it, master it, and divert it to such channels as he desired, but lesser lights were in some danger of being mastered by that with which they played, and instead of writing scores like "Otello," where the florid roulades time out of mind add point and meaning to the dramatic situations, ended by writing music that was consigned speedily to oblivion,

and which it will serve no purpose to rake up.

Bellini's first opera leads one to suppose that though it was his first sustained attempt at operatic writing he must previously have studied very carefully the special requirements for theatrical writing, planning and spacing libretti and such like. Also he must have devoted much time to the human voice, for his two first operas show that from the start of his career he possessed the art of drawing out its most beautiful qualities. And the orchestra? His master belonged to the past generation, to the pre-Rossinian period when the orchestral portion of a work—or, to be rather more accurate, the instrumentation—was simple in the extreme, though in its way beautiful, and in this way Bellini's education might have been fuller; yet what he did learn was characterised by refinement and delicacy of effect. Rossini's operas, with their singularly fine instrumentation, he particularly admired, and what knowledge he possessed in this respect must have been largely gained from them. During the whole

of his career he was always most solicitous to improve his knowledge of this branch, and his later works show a decided advance.

There is another point to be mentioned. An eminent statesman has said that good taste is a quality which must be natural and cannot be acquired. True—but when it is there it is better for being trained and cultivated, and there is a style and elegance about Bellini's music not often to be found in music after the school to which his music belongs had waned. Mirth and elegance, it would seem, are no longer wanted in the art he cultivated—and the art is the poorer.

It must not be thought that he neglected the ground-work of music while pursuing his studies of operatic composition; on the contrary he seems to have felt that his knowledge and mastery of counterpoint was somewhat deficient, which is not to be wondered at when we remember that Tritto was eighty-four years of age when Bellini entered his class, and so for some months he took lessons outside the Conservatoire under Raimondi and his former

fellow-student Carlo Conti. Bellini was all his life a sincere student eager to learn, and Tritto's advanced age may very likely have had much to do with the fact that he was never thoroughly at home in some of the grammar of his art.

The autumn of 1824 found him hard at work on his first opera, a work which amply proved the genius and industry of the student, and the following story—which, however, has every air of improbability—is extant concerning it. Zingarelli, as already mentioned, was a very strict master, and did not care for efforts at originality in his students' work, nor for traces of Rossini's influence, and one day Bellini brought him a composition in which the traces of the forbidden fruit were very discernible. Zingarelli flew into a rage—Bellini was used to his rages, which were frequent and which soon passed, and besides which he knew his position as a pupil; but this rage did not abate as soon as usual. Zingarelli worked himself up to a great pitch of anger, and ended by telling the

Sicilian that he was an ignoramus and would never accomplish anything. This was too much for Bellini; he contained himself while in the room, but escaped as soon as possible, and meeting immediately his friend Anselmo Dezio, burst out:

"He says I am an ignoramus and that I shall never do anything. Well, I swear by all that is holy if I ever accomplish anything I will compose a 'Romeo and Juliet.'"

The force of this remark being of course that Zingarelli's best work is on that subject. Needless to say, this has absolutely no connection with "I Capuleti," even supposing that the story is true, for Bellini was at first very loth to compose work on that subject for fear of offending his old master, to whom he was genuinely attached, and besides his was a character quite incapable of harbouring such thoughts even if in the heat of the moment they burst forth.

The story goes that he then went to Donizetti and Pacini and told them of the incident, that they advised him to begin the composition

of an opera, and that Zingarelli when he heard declared he would have nothing whatever to do with it, so Bellini wrote it unaided. The story is unlikely. Zingarelli kept his students in strict order, and the business of a student is to do as he is told and not as he pleases; furthermore the opera itself leads one to think that Zingarelli may have suggested its composition and supervised it as composed, for it has rather too fine and delicate a finish for an unaided first attempt.

Bellini chose for his libretto "Adelson e Salvini" by Tottola—a moderately bad poet and author of "Mosé"—which had already been set to music by Fioraventi.

The scene is laid in Ireland in the seventeenth century, and concerns the doings of a certain Lord Adelson, his friend Salvini an Italian artist, two young ladies Nelly and Fanny, and various other personages, the comic element being supplied by Bonifacio, Salvini's Neapolitan servant. The story is pretty, and is prettily set to music. When finished the little opera was rehearsed by his fellow-students

—his friends Marras, Manzi, and Perugini taking part—and was performed in the theatre attached to the Collegio on 12th January, 1825.

It was a great success, and was subsequently performed every Sunday during the Carnival season. Everyone was delighted, especially Zingarelli, who, after the manner of the impulsive South, embraced his favourite pupil and shed tears. It certainly deserved to succeed, for considered on its intrinsic merits it is a charming little opera—much of the music Bellini transferred to his later works, for which reason he used to call it his "Gran pasticcio"—and as a first work by an Italian composer it is remarkable. As Chorley says of Italian genius, "It learns and grows while creating. If it be moved by no deep purpose it avails itself of self-correction; it strengthens its force on unconscious experience." So it frequently happens that Italian composers have written a large number of works before they have made any real impression or done their talents true justice. Furthermore, as at the period we are now considering they were often at the start of their careers somewhat

deficient in technique, much of their studying was done when their careers had actually begun —by constant and incessant practice; for with operatic composition—the form of art which appeals most to southerners—there is nothing so beneficial as persistent application to that form, and there are many operas very fine from the purely musical point of view which as theatrical works rank far below those inferior to them in musical value, because their composers were lacking in the peculiar judgment, knowledge, and experience necessary for successful theatrical composition. So, all things considered, Bellini acquitted himself very well in his first attempt.

The overture, though not specially interesting, showed the audience which had assembled to judge the first flights of the composer that although the ideas expressed might still be somewhat immature, they nevertheless were definitely formed. There is no stumbling or stuttering discernible. The introduction begins with a solo for Fanny, which afterwards became "*Meco tu vieni*" in "La Straniera." Struley's air

is not interesting, but the *Buffo* air for Bonifacio is a very bright and attractive number, even if not particularly comic; the charming orchestral movement which accompanies the old servant's musical parlance is founded on a short little motif, but so deftly is it varied that it never becomes wearisome, and rather gains in brightness and animation as the movement proceeds. The duet which follows is effective, and the next number, Nelly's romance, "*Dopo l'Oscuro Nembo*," is perhaps the best movement in the whole work. This beautiful air—one of his best—he afterwards introduced into "I Capuleti" as Juliet's "*Oh Quante Volti.*" In the second act the most interesting pieces are the duets for Bonifacio and Salvini and Adelson and Salvini, especially the latter, where from Adelson's "*Qual dolor*" to the close the music flows along with real verve, and the *finale* brings the work to a lively finish. The only other part of the work that calls for mention is the recitative. It is the old-style *recitativo secco*, and there is rather too much of it; but though Bellini never subsequently made use of this type of

musical speech, it shows that he had mastered the art of writing this essentially Italian form.*

A fault often noticeable in first operas—through lack of experience—is the way that some of the scenes miss fire, but as far as can be judged from a perusal of the score this is not the case with "Adelson e Salvini," for Bellini possessed a natural instinct as to what music was suitable for the theatre. And again, this early work, though not strikingly original, yet possesses the evidence of a distinct and fairly well formed individuality—allusions to other composers not being very apparent, one or two slight suggestions of Rossini are hardly worth mentioning. The construction is simple and the finish careful. The work of course belongs to the period in which it was written, though one can see in it a distinct influence of

* In the MS. in the British Museum the recitative is different to that in the autograph score in the library of the Conservatoire at Naples, being largely curtailed, differently set, and accompanied freely by the stringed instruments. As the score was purchased from Mapelson, it is possible that the alterations were made in view of a performance in this country. "*Dopo l'Oscuro Nembo*" is also different, being set to an air in G minor, but having too the harp accompaniment.

the older generation of composers; indeed all Bellini's early work shows slightly the influence of Zingarelli. The orchestral portion is careful, though at times thin—in spite of the fact it is scored for full orchestra, including three trombones and tuba—but the technical portion, which can truly be considered excellent, is, needless to say, the vocal writing and the way in which the orchestra lends itself to showing up the vocal parts. The most beautiful qualities of the voice are called into play; much of the music, however, is very difficult, and one cannot help wishing that many modern operatic singers who have made their reputation and fill important rôles had the same execution these Neapolitan students possessed.

Lastly, there is in much of this music a strain of artless happiness—at times almost merriment—somewhat suggestive of the pre-Rossinian opera-buffo, not to be found in any of his later works. The comic element was never congenial to Bellini's expression, and this is the only opera wherein he attempted it, though here the attempt amounts more to

liveliness than mirth. After this such feeling for it as he possessed totally disappeared, owing very likely to the events of the next few months; and though in his later works he occasionally wrote gay music—with great success sometimes, as in the "Puritani" *polacca*—yet the innocent happiness of such pieces as the lively little melody "*Di Piaca la Voce*" in the first *finale* is never subsequently to be met with in his work.

It will be understood from what has been said that Bellini's first opera was a decided success, and the friends and professors of the young Sicilian had every right to feel proud of him. His outlook was then a very happy one, and we can well picture the joyful letters he must have despatched to Catania.

Success is, in youth at anyrate, a great encouragement and incentive to work, and "Adelson" was no sooner finished and performed than the *Maestrino* un 'ertook a fresh composition of some importance, but this time sacred, commanded very likely by Zingarelli. And the mass—for that was its form—when

completed was sent to Catania and performed in the Church of St Francis.

As Bellini's name is not usually associated with this class of composition, a few words may be acceptable concerning the work. It is written for four voices—soprano, contralto, tenor, and bass—and orchestra consisting, besides strings, of two flutes, oboes, clarionets, trumpets, horns, bassoons, and one trombone, but no kettledrums, strange to say. The first movement, the "*Kyrie Eleison*," is perhaps the best of the whole. It is a singularly beautiful number, reflecting somewhat the old Italian influence and breathing forth an atmosphere of quiet contemplation tinged slightly with sadness. The orchestral portion of the score is of much importance and the instrumentation delicate and well suited to the colour and character, to the devotional feeling which pervades the music. In the opening bars and again at the first entry of the voices the solemn and subdued tones of the solitary trombone in conjunction with the dreamy, abstracted phrases for the violins are very impressive.

The presence of what is called theatricalism

in nearly all Italian sacred music of the nineteenth century is often taken as evidence of the lack of religious and devotional feeling in such music, and thereby accusing it of not fulfilling its purpose; but the question turns on what is sacred, and in what consists devotion? Time and experience have shown that in music as in painting certain strict forms of art are most generally satisfactory — though not absolutely necessary — for sacred work; however, leaving such technical matters apart and considering only the *spirit* of the work, it is probably a question that opposing parties will argue for many a long day without convincing each other. The only real solution is that each style is religious and devotional to the temperament that created it. However, those who think theatricalism bad—which it certainly is when unallied with other qualities—will be very pleasantly surprised with the *Kyrie* of Bellini's mass, for not the slightest suggestion of the theatre is to be found in it, and much the same may be said of the *Gloria*, a very fine movement, showing the influence of Pergolesi without, however, any

imitation. But it must be confessed that the *Laudamus* for tenor and soprano is a falling off in the matter of religious style; the second subject of the *andante*, which resembles the Rossini of "La Cenerentola," and the whole of the *allegro* decidedly clash with the dignity and classical feeling of the *Kyrie* and *Gloria*. It has just been said that different temperaments express themselves in divers manners on sacred matters. Religion is felt in a somewhat different way, as Haweis remarks, in Innsbruck than at Palermo, and there is no reason why Bellini, though lapsing into the operatic style, should not have made his *Laudamus* devotional even if in a different manner from the preceding movements—the lack of homogeneity that results we are not for the moment considering—and it must be remembered that Handel's sacred music, or even much of Pergolesi's, is just as theatrical with reference to its epoch as is Rossini's or Verdi's; it just as much resembles the opera music of the time. The strict sacred music of that date was to a great extent impersonal. Its composers were, in their art

at anyrate, saturated with the spirit of the cloister, and their music rather represents the contemplations of a devout and holy monk than the supplications of a sinner. But Bellini in the *Laudamus* has rather missed the mark, and though the music is not bad—far from it—it is decidedly beside the point. The same may be said of the *Domine Deus*, a bass solo, the *andante* of which is somewhat after his usual manner. In the *Qui Tollis* the full vocal quartette once more appears. It is a very good number, and does not clash with the first movements nearly so much as those previously mentioned. This cannot, however, be said of the *Qui Sedes*—Zingarelli must have winced when he saw it—the charming little melody in the *allegro* of the duet for tenor and baritone in the second act of "Adelson e Salvini" being here introduced, and though very effective musically is palpably out of place. The short *Cum Sanctu Spiritu* calls for no special remarks, and leads to the fugal *Amen*, which has the merit of bringing the work to an impressive close.

The instrumentation should have a word or two. It is correct, in one or two places shows considerable fancy, and is kept well in restraint — the trombone being employed in but the first, second, and last movements—its worst fault perhaps is that the clarionets are used rather too persistently.

Considered as a whole the mass gives one the impression of being a fine work spoilt by the mixture of style. The best movements decidedly show that had Bellini wished it, had he studied for that end, had he devoted his energies to it with the same intense application that he gave to operatic composition, he could have achieved much in sacred writing.

We are now nearing the end of Bellini's stay at Naples. The years he spent there had been marked by unwearied application to the study of his Art, and the time had now come for him to leave the protecting wing of the Collegio and to take his place in the struggle for fame. The armaments wherewith

he was equipped for this battle in which so few succeed were peculiar, and though sufficient for him, would have been fatal to anyone less or differently gifted by nature. Great genius he had—the gift of beautiful melody, melody not only valuable musically but appropriate dramatically and admirably adapted to the human voice; great judgment in the construction of operas, in planning the varied ways in which the pieces follow and contrast each other —a faculty with many composers only to be acquired by incessant production. His use of the orchestra—often found fault with—though not enterprising on its own account, was excellently fitted for the purpose of sustaining and showing off the vocal part of his scores. Against this must be balanced the lack of technical knowledge which would have enabled him to construct more elaborate or highly-developed movements; his technique was poor, save in the knowledge of the voice—a branch which many a learned musician has never mastered — but it was sufficient for his ends, as he kept well within it at the start, and

as he developed, consciously or unconsciously he widened the means at his disposal.

So at the age of twenty-three we have our composer ready to attempt the seizure of the operatic world with his music.

His actual début, however—unless the students' performance of "Adelson e Salvini" be considered as such—was made before he left the Collegio, and was not with an opera but a cantata performed at the San Carlo, the theatre where so many classics of the Italian stage have been produced. It was then the custom whenever a gala performance was held—generally in honour of a birthday of one of the Royal Family—for one of the most promising *Maestrini* at the Collegio to be asked to write a Festival cantata for the occasion. It was an excellent plan, for it gave the *Maestrino* confidence and encouragement, and also let the Impresario know if talent was at hand, in which case—as in Bellini's—the commission for an opera sometimes followed. So in the spring of 1825 Bellini was entrusted with the composition of the cantata for a forthcoming gala, which was duly composed, and bore the

name of "Ismene." It was a complete success; the King led the applause—such was the custom on these occasions, when there was applause at all—and the rest of the audience followed suit—the courtiers because it pleased their master, and the others because the music pleased them. The work was afterwards performed at Catania in honour of the marriage of one of the composer's friends. Whether it is preserved in any musical library, or has disappeared to be no more seen, like many a composition probably of more worth, the present writer cannot say; but we may be sure that if it contained music of more than usual merit it has not been lost, for Bellini, like Handel and Rossini, was economical with his music, and if a fine piece seemed likely to be buried in an unsuccessful work, it was transferred and given another chance of life.

And now, the cantata performed, his apprenticeship in art closed, but not his studentship, for like all true artists he was ever learning, and he left the institution where he had passed six uneventful but happy years, where he had made many friends, and where, it may be said—

without much exaggeration — he was almost loved by all, from Zingarelli to the junior students whom he taught. From being a student he might now style himself as *Il Maestro* Bellini — if it gave him any satisfaction.

One more incident and the chapter must close. As mentioned previously, among the Neapolitans of his acquaintance were the Fumaroli family. Signor Fumaroli was a Judge, of good birth, and had a charming daughter, Maddelena. Bellini was a constant visitor, and between him and the girl a friendship sprang up which soon turned to love. And little wonder, perhaps! Both were good-looking; nature had given the composer a face of singular charm and nobility—beautiful features, large, clear blue eyes, and abundant light hair. Both were followers of the Arts, for his lady was a poetess, and one of her poems, a very charming one, he set to music: "*Dolente Immagine.*" And so when his student days were over he asked the father for permission to marry his daughter. He was met with an absolute,

blank refusal, and as neither his arguments nor Maddelena's tears were of any avail, there was nothing left for them but to part. But neither really recovered; the shock left its impress on the Sicilian's sensitive nature, and from that time forth the moods of depression to which he had been subjected from his boyhood stole over him more often and with greater intensity.

It is said—most probably without foundation—that after he had made his name Maddelena's father tried to approach him for the purpose of bringing the matter to a more satisfactory standing, but that Bellini's pride forbade it. It is possible. That he was excessively proud—with a pride not to be confused with conceit or arrogance—we know from the letters he wrote apropos of his rupture with Romani, but it is highly improbable, for when pride and love come in conflict love must win, if only it be genuine, and that it was so in this case there is no doubt. Nine years after, while in Paris, when he heard of her death—it was the same year as his own, Maddelena being a year or two younger—he wrote to Florimo: "I can never

marry another woman," and later on, in the depression which the sad news brought on, he again told his friend with a gloomy foreboding that proved only too true: "I feel it will not be long before I follow to the grave the poor girl that I loved so much."

IV

"BIANCA E FERNANDO"

IN the lives of many artists there exists between the time they finish their schooling and the moment when they first attract public attention a gap, filled, only too often, by poverty and continual disappointment—disappointment in spite of the fact that frequently these periods have been productive of great works which have afterwards been accounted masterpieces—and has still more often been devoted to incessant labour worthy of great praise and, at least, of some fitting reward. For some the bright time has never come, and before the public has lent its ear to the appreciation of these works the master who created them has passed away.

Happily this was not so in Bellini's case. He had never to solicit managers to produce his

works, nor had he his scores returned with conventional apologies—or none at all. At the outset fortune favoured him; he found it easy to get a first hearing, and when once his music was heard his genius ensured it a welcome place in the repertoire of the theatres.

So to continue the story of his life.

Having parted with his Maddelena, his chief idea was to obtain a commission for an opera and push on with his work, and he met with no difficulties. The Duke of Noja, besides being governor of the Conservatoire, was also superintendent of the Royal Theatres, and when Bellini mentioned the matter he referred him to Barbaja, the Impresario of the San Carlo. This remarkable man happened to have been present at a performance of "Adelson e Salvini," and the music had much impressed him; the impression had been deepened by the success of the cantata "Ismene," and he willingly offered to produce an opera by the young master, for which he agreed to pay 300 ducats.* The contract signed, and Bellini furnished with

* Silver ducats.

a libretto by Gilardoni called "Bianca e Fernando" (or Gernando), his great desire was to leave Naples—Naples that contained the one he loved, but whom he might not see. Moreover, he had not been home for six years, and accordingly in the early days of August, 1825, he said good-bye to Florimo, Zingarelli, and his other friends, and left Naples for Catania.

So once more we behold Bellini in Sicily—not the half-taught student, but the composer of a charming opera and a fine mass, "Scrittatura" to produce a dramatic work in the next spring season at the San Carlo, the leading theatre in the south of Italy. It is unnecessary to do more than touch on his joy at seeing his parents again, his relations and former friends. We can well imagine the talks they must have had and the interest taken in his compositions, especially by his grandfather—the pupil of Piccini—for how music had altered since the days when he was a student at Naples! So the autumn and winter passed quietly and quickly enough, and in the sympathy of his parents—especially his mother—and his continuous work at his opera,

he sought to soothe, if he could not obliterate, the bitterness of the blow he had received in the unhappy termination of his love affair. The winter over and the opera completed, he once more left Catania in the early months of 1826 and returned to Naples to superintend the rehearsals of "Bianca e Fernando," the first performance of which took place at the San Carlo on 30th May.

All through his career he was most fortunate in his interpreters, and at this time some of the finest singers in the world were to be found in Naples. Barbaja was responsible for this highly creditable state of affairs. In 1816 he engaged Rossini as his musical director, and the latter gathered together an incomparable troupe of singers, and though he did not remain long in command, he succeeded whilst there in raising the company to a level of general excellence which it long maintained. Connected with the Neapolitan opera at one time or another were Colbrand, Dardinelle, Donzelli, Nozzari, Rubini, Lablache, Garcia, Lalande, and many another famous artist. Some idea of the size of his

company may be formed from the following anecdote. One day hearing a singer who pleased him greatly, Barbaja introduced himself and offered her good terms if she would join his company. "But how is this?" she exclaimed. "I have belonged to your company for three months, and have been drawing my salary regularly."—"You don't say so," cried Barbaja. "Go at once to the musical director and tell him to give you a part." On another occasion one of his leading singers did not please, and was hissed, whereupon Barbaja called out: "Never mind the brutes. You draw your salary from me, and I tell you that you sing divinely."

He produced some of the greatest Italian works, "Otello," "La Donna del Lago," "Lucia di Lammermoor," and many others, and that he was able to carry on things in this independent and lavish scale will be more readily understood when it is stated that he did not rely solely on the theatrical coffers for his profits, but had attached to the San Carlo, during some years of his management, large gaming houses, and these furnished a handsome portion of his revenue

— a fixed share of which actually formed part of his agreement with Rossini. His energy was enormous; at one and the same time he was Impresario of two operas in Naples, the Scala at Milan, and two more theatres in Vienna, and in this way kept going a constant exchange of novelties between these various musical centres.

And so by this man with his splendid company the work that may properly be considered as the beginning of Bellini's career was produced. The first performance was a distinct success. Pacini, who heard it, wrote: "'Bianca e Fernando.' The second work of our dear Bellini has achieved a success — if not a very enthusiastic one." Donizetti, who was also present, was more decided in his praise: "'Bianca e Gernando' (Fernando no perche e peccato!)"—he wrote the same night—"the first production of our Bellini—Bella! Bella! Bella!—especially as it is the first time he has written." That the work was well received is certain, and a very significant fact is that Barbaja offered Bellini a contract for a new opera to be brought out at La

Scala, which, needless to say, he accepted with delight.

Two years later "Bianca" was revised and three new pieces were added, but the work should still be considered as coming before "Il Pirata"—the changes made not being very material ones—and it will be best to say what is to be said at once.

It is an unequal work, many pages of the score being insipid, dull, and uninspired. It may not have exactly the winning charm of "Adelson," for the nature of the libretto forbids it, but it allows of a certain dignity, and this to some extent has been attained. If not so uniformly successful as the earlier work, it aspires far higher, and in its better movements shows a very great advance. The best numbers are much stronger, being very well knit, the touches are surer, the dramatic expression more poignant, and the orchestral portion somewhat more interesting. A very good idea of the progression may be obtained by comparing the overtures of the two works. In both the ideas are good, but the earlier work is very

loosely constructed; the movements are little else than strung together, whereas in the "Bianca" overture both movements are well developed, and the result is a fine composition. There is real beauty in the sad, slow movement, and the *allegro* with its simple theme is well wrought out, and shows considerable originality. Its parentage, if it can be traced anywhere, is not so much in his contemporaries as in the later eighteenth century Italians. The worst feature is perhaps a tendency towards what is noisy.

The first act contains much weak music; until half-way through the fifth number, the *terzetto*, there is little of interest, but then the music wakes up, and the beginning of the *finale* with its trumpets and drums atones for what has gone before; the chorus "*Viva Bianca*" is excellent, the style is fine, and the feeling of festivity and rejoicing very well expressed. A noticeable feature is the way in which the commonest harmonies are used with great effect, in this respect resembling the old classical composers. The second movement of this *finale* is not quite so happy, but the concluding *allegro* is truly spirited.

The second act is far finer than the first. It contains a romance for two women, "*Sorgi o Padre*," in which Bellini shows his power as a true melodist; a very well constructed duet containing some fanciful passages for the orchestra, and it also includes the wonderful movement afterwards transferred to Norma as the scene for Oreveso and chorus by the lake in Act II, which, however, it must be confessed is to some extent a plagiarism, its origin being easily traced to the opening of Beethoven's "Moonlight" sonata. There is also an excellent *allegro* which afterwards appeared in "Beatrice," but here again Bellini can hardly be styled the originator, for it may be doubted if he would ever have found this melody had Rossini never written "Otello." The *Aria Finale* is excellent, especially as regards the *allegro* "*Alla gioia ed il piacer*," which works up to great animation at the end, and though not such a show piece for the singer, nor so forcible in expression, is rather more out of the ordinary than the once so famous "*Ah non giunge!*"

"Bianca" in itself was hardly strong enough to

carry its composer's name beyond the stage of its birth, but it confirmed and strengthened the good opinion which those interested in the young composer had formed of him. It was well interpreted, Lalande and Lablache were in the cast, but the best piece of good fortune was that Rubini sang the tenor part. It has been truly said that Bellini and this great singer were born for each other; the influence they exerted over each other was certainly most happy. Rubini perceived the novelty of the young Sicilian's music, and found that in its comparative simplicity he could make even more effect than in the florid compositions he had hitherto sung; so well, too, did he understand the composer's aim that even the weakest airs in his hands were suffused with feeling. His greatest successes were in Bellini's operas.

For the best part of the succeeding twelve months Bellini undertook no important composition, but it must not be thought that the time was idly spent. He undoubtedly felt that the next work he submitted to the public

would, for good or bad, have a considerable effect on his career. It was comparatively easy then, and may be still, to get an initial hearing in Italy. His first works had been favourably received, he had acquired a certain reputation as a coming man, had been commissioned for an opera for the Scala, and much was expected of him. If it failed the public would think the promise shown had been over-rated, and he might not find it so easy to obtain another hearing at an important theatre. Again, he knew that the Scala audience was not so easily satisfied as that of the San Carlo — who could be critical in Naples?—and so we may be sure that the time was well spent studying and making preparation for the coming work.

At the very outset of his career he held decided views of the relation of the music to the drama. He knew that not only must the music express faithfully the emotions of the personages and the incidents of the play—as it does in all the great Italian works, in spite of the dictum of many modern critics — but that the drama itself must be good. He had no

intention of carelessly flinging away superb music on libretti, the dullness of which would eventually bury that music, as Rossini did time and time again. The importance of a thoroughly good poem in every way he recognised — but where to get it?

To write good libretti many faculties must be possessed—all those necessary to the dramatist and in addition the gift of making verse that shall be essentially musical. Now, it is not everyone possessed of these gifts who cares to subordinate himself to the composer and to let him reap the glory—if glory there be. Of the thousands who have heard, let us say, "Il Trovatore," how many know that Cammarano was answerable for the book? And so the field has been left mostly to inferior men, and the result cannot on the whole be considered satisfactory.

Among Bellini's acquaintances was a certain Tosi, brother of the prima donna of that name, and one night when the subject was being talked over in his friend's rooms Bellini asked him whom he thought the best librettist of the period.

"Felice Romani," was the prompt reply, and the upshot of the conversation was that when he went to Milan our musician had a letter of introduction from Zingarelli to the famous librettist.

Romani had so great an influence on Bellini that it will not be out of place to dwell on him for a moment or so. He was born at Genoa in 1788, graduated at Pisa University, and was intended for the law, but as that was not much to his liking, he took to literature. His first dramatic piece was a comedy called "L'Amante e L'Impostore." He was for some years editor of the *Gazetta Piemontesi*, but it was as a librettist that he gained his chief fame, and in this branch of letters he did his greatest work. His earliest libretto to attract much attention was "Medea" (1812), written for Meyer, and in the next thirty-five years he wrote opera books for nearly all the celebrated Italian composers of the period, many of whom were inspired to their best works by setting his poems. It was not till Donizetti wrote "Anna Bolena" that he attained real fame, though

it was his thirty-third opera. To "Lucrezia," "L'Elisir," and "Parisina" he wrote some of his best music; and so with many other composers. It must not, however, be thought that all Romani's poems are good. He wrote between eighty and a hundred, and some fall considerably below his usual standard. His poor "Turco in Italia" submerged Rossini's delightful music, and other examples could be quoted. But, taking him altogether, he can rank as one of the greatest poets who have written for the operatic stage. Only Metastasio, Signor Boito, and perhaps Scribe can equal him. His judgment of character was great, and this was equalled by his extensive knowledge of history and of custom. He was equally at home with Aurelian in Palmyra, Norma in the temple of Irminsul, the gentle Amina, the amusing charlatan Dulcamara, or the intrigues of the Borgias.

He perceived—if only modern librettists would copy him!—how picturesque, how suitable for opera, are the history and doings of the Middle Ages, and though he perhaps rarely originated his plots—librettists seldom do—the titles of

his works show how he appreciated the fascination and picturesqueness of mediæval Europe.

Not only are his works dramatic in conception, so concise in their planning that cuts cannot well be made, and beautiful in form and detail, but his verses are especially noteworthy. There is some grand writing in "Norma," and "La Sonnambula" is replete with charming idyllic poetry.

Perhaps the writer may be permitted to say —by way of a diversion — that it was this Italian who saw the dignity and grandeur, the appropriateness for operatic treatment of the story of Anne Boleyn. English composers seem averse to composing operas on English subjects. Fifty years ago, when there was a distinct striving towards a national opera, the subjects were more often than not of a foreign nature, and nowadays on the rare occasions when a native opera is produced the odds are it concerns the pale imitations of Wagner's Norsemen or incidents taken from some German fairy tale, and if, by any chance, the subject

is a national one, it is generally about some threadbare village intrigue. In our History, Legend, and Romance there are subjects enough to supply a generation of composers with magnificent libretti; and if only they would realise this, as Sullivan did in "Ivanhoe," a national opera would be a small step nearer realisation.* But return we to Romani. He became blind some years before his death, was pensioned by the Government, and died at Moneglia in 1865 "full of years and honours."

* Many British subjects have been successfully set by Italians, as "Lucia di Lammermoor," "Rosamonda," "Kenilworth," "Elizabetta," "La Donna del Lago," etc., etc.

V

"IL PIRATA," "LA STRANIERA," AND "ZAIRA"

BELLINI left Naples for Milan on 5th April, 1827, in company with Rubini, and on his arrival in that city took up his quarters in the "Via Santa Margherita." His fame as a promising composer had preceded him, as also had his reputation for personal charm, and he speedily found himself in the society of the most cultivated and distinguished Milanese, amongst whom were the Princess Belgiojoso and Signor Francesco Pollini, the brilliant and original pianist and pupil of Mozart, and his wife. These last must specially be mentioned, for though they were many years older, a great intimacy arose between them and the younger musician, and the depth and reality of their attachment was amply proved later on. However, the most significant

of all these fresh friendships was that with Romani. Bellini presented his letters of introduction, and from thence—happy day for his art!—they became firm friends on both personal and artistic grounds.

Romani willingly undertook to furnish the libretto for the coming opera. The subject of "Il Pirata" was proposed, and Bellini agreed. It is a story full of romantic colouring founded on the disputes of the houses of Manfred and Anjou, and contains excellent opportunities for music and some dramatic situations, even if not a play that especially impresses one; perhaps, too, the composer was pleased that the scene was laid in his native Sicily. So the pair that were to work together so often and so successfully began to co-operate for the first time. The artistic sympathy between them was great, and in every opera that they produced together, except perhaps the last, Bellini found that his librettist understood his wants almost before he could shape them into words, and the grand and beautiful verse inspired him to his measured, flowing melodies. For a comparison we must turn to

Da Ponte and Mozart in "Don Giovanni," Rossini and Sterbini in the "Barbiere," or in later times to Signor Boito and Verdi in "Otello."

One can well imagine the beneficial influence that the older man must have had on the younger, for Bellini, despite his genius and a certain precocity of talent, was but inexperienced. However, Romani's was not the only influence to which he was subjected during the composition of this opera, for Rubini, the "King of Tenors," was constantly with him, at one time even staying in the same house, and we do not know what alterations, what additions, what changes were not made at his suggestion; but it is certain that much experience must have been gained by the composer in vocal writing by this opportunity of studying the style, the voice, and the method of the great artist. It was a piece of good fortune such as falls to few young musicians.

So the time passed busily enough and withal pleasantly. Often in the evenings Bellini would visit the houses of one or another of his friends, or turn host himself—a part he excelled in—

and then portions of the coming opera were to be heard. At length the rehearsals began, and they did not always go smoothly. However much he may have profited by Rubini's advice, he was not afraid of telling the singer his faults, which he had in plenty when singing, and singing only, was not concerned; and it was with great difficulty that he could be made to merge himself into his dramatic part and forget that he was Rubini. It was not till he had had some pretty straight things told him that this end was obtained. Then the prima donna, Meric-Lalande, was not satisfied —a common fault with prima donnas. She did not like some of her music; would Bellini cut it out and rewrite it?—No, certainly not. It was not florid enough (most sopranos would find it hard enough to execute now); would he write an *Aria di Bravura?*—Not under any circumstances. So at length, everybody satisfied or quieted and the rehearsals finished, the opera was performed on 27th October. It had been rumoured that the music was good, and that the young Sicilian's opera was to be a

great event, so the theatre was crowded, and the audience was not disappointed, for the night was one of great triumph.

But let Bellini tell it, partly in his own words. On 29th October he wrote to his uncle :—

"Let my parents and friends rejoice, your nephew has had the good fortune of gaining a complete success with his opera. . . . As soon as I showed myself the public received me with great applause. The overture began, and pleased considerably. The introduction containing but a single chorus, was rather badly sung, but as it comes in the midst of a storm the audience did not perceive this, and at the end applauded much. The *aria d'entrata* for Rubini created a furore such as I cannot describe, and I had to get up and bow at least ten times. The *cavatina* for the prima donna was also applauded. Then followed the chorus of Pirates, which pleased much . . . and then the scene for Rubini and Lalande, at the end of which the audience shouted like madmen and made such a noise that I thought I was in the infernal regions."

The *finale* was also successful, and at the end

of the act he was led on the stage to receive the congratulations of the house, after which the singers came in for their share of the applause.

"The second act begins with a chorus for women which I have harmonised well, but which was coldly received, as the choristers were too numerous and often out of tune." * Other numbers were well received, and of the closing scenes the delighted composer says :—

"The Italian language has no words to describe the tumultuous spirit that seized the public . . . and I was twice obliged to show myself on the stage with the singers." This was before the days of sunk orchestras, a fad which muffles the sound and hinders many parts of the house hearing the delicacy of the instrumentation, a fad to which the Scala, the only house in Italy, the present writer believes, has recently succumbed. "The third performance will be to-morrow, because this evening they are

* Operatic managers take warning! Surely all frequent operagoers have time out of mind heard movements like the chorus, "*Zitti, Zitti, Moviam a Vendetta*" in "Rigoletto," spoilt by too large a choir.

giving 'Mosé' in order that La Lalande may rest."

The end of the letter is very interesting and highly characteristic: "My joy is extreme, for I did not expect a result so happy. Such a success encourages me to continue my career with honour." This looks as if in moods of depression he became sceptical of the value of his work. "I will arrive at something by study . . . for the present I do not wish to return to Naples before having established my reputation all over Italy by other efforts." He concludes by saying that he wished to find something that would be new in music, and that his upbringing had taught him the sense of duty to do the best that was in him, that he despised arrogance "born of mediocrity."

The success of "Il Pirata" was genuine, and three months after its first production it was well received in Vienna; after that it soon travelled over Europe, and Bellini's name was everywhere regarded with interest. The music was generally well received, though the more pedantic of the musicians and critics in some

places lost no opportunity for letting loose their usual remarks of "flimsy, feeble," etc., etc. However, from that day young Bellini's fame was assured, and among the many gratifying episodes that resulted from the success of this opera was the fact that he made Rossini's acquaintance. *Il Maestro di Maestri* happened to be in Milan just then, and heard the first performance; he was delighted, and expressed a desire to meet the composer. This resulted in an introduction, and Rossini complimented the younger musician, telling him that he had made an exceedingly good start, in fact that he had started where many a composer left off. And perhaps that just describes "Il Pirata." Chorley summed it up very fairly when he said: "Weak as that opera is (only containing a couple of tenor airs that are now sung *) an individuality exists in Bellini's music. Wherever individuality is not mere eccentricity there is always interest in it—there is always a chance of that interest becoming a charm." It was this individuality that captivated everyone, singers and audience.

* 1862.

The music was new; there is a soft sweetness pervading it which is to be felt in all Bellini's work—save "Norma"; there is in it a charm and glow of colour, a dreamy tenderness that is not weakness, and must not be confused with it. Bellini was too sincere to be really weak, though "Il Pirata," like most early works, is full of lapses, and sometimes were it not for its sincerity would appear trivial; but if there are failings in one direction it occasionally attains to great heights in the other.

The overture which pleased the Milanese was not always so fortunate; in England the *Harmonicon* remarked that it was the weakest overture yet produced by the Italian school, and though this was a gross exaggeration, it certainly cannot be considered a strong work—despite its charm. It has, though in a less degree, the faults of the "Adelson e Salvini" *sinfonia;* it is a slenderly-connected string of movements, though in places there is some good writing. The introduction, a tempest, has real grandeur about it; it is splendidly suggestive of the bursts of storm, the boiling waters, and the

mingling of sea and sky. The *allegro moderato* for Gualtiero, "*Nel Furore Della Tempesta*," is a lovely melody, but the succeeding movements are not of much account until we come to Imogen's *aria*, which contains something that is novel, and much that is beautiful—which *convinces*. Lovely too is the recitative which precedes it for Imogen and Itulbo, the truth and depth of the expression, the charm of the intervals, the sweetness, yet dignity, of the sequence of the chords making a truly noble piece of music. After this follows the chorus of Pirates at their potations, a very characteristic composition; it is, however, to be hoped that Gualtiero kept his companions in better order on board ship than on land, for a noisier crew of rascals could not well be imagined. The scene for Imogen and Gualtiero is one of the best portions of the work, a sustained duet of great charm and colour; in it the union of voices and orchestra in the principal subject of the *allegro* is very noticeable, an example that repudiates—if example be allowed to—the modern practice, and therefore, it may be supposed, theory, that when the orchestra

assumes the important part the voice must be treated ungratefully and distastefully. The rest of the act calls for no special mention, save that the march may be said to be successful and that the *finale*, as is usual with Bellini, is carefully constructed, long and diversified, and contains a carefully-written quintet, in which the bass voice is admirably used in conjunction with the others, and *stretto*.

The second act contains two good duets and a *trio*—at one passage the contrast of the phrases for the lovers is hardly outdone in tenderness by anything in music—but the greatest success was always obtained by the tenor air "*Tu Vedrai*," though this cannot be called a strong composition. It does not compare with "*Vivi tu!*" from "Anna Bolena," with which it somehow or other paired off, yet it is so essentially pleasing, and moreover—and this is an important point, as explaining its great popularity—was so well constructed to suit Rubini's voice, to give him opportunity for judicious — not inartistic — vocal display and embroidery, as "delicate as Mechlin lace," that, as sung by him,

it was always the success of the evening, and more than once the success that decided the otherwise uncertain fate of the opera. The final scene begins with a beautiful and touching prelude for *Corno Inglese* and harp, but the *aria finale* is weak, though the florid vocal writing and orchestral bustle bring the work to an effective close—superficially.

Technically there is much that is good in the work, though the craft is in no way ambitious or interesting, and the same may be said of the orchestration. It is an opera full of charm and original passages, and the harmonies are mostly rich. But it must be acknowledged that occasionally there is a sense of platitude about the melodies, which with prolific artists is often the case at the *beginning* of their career, and the modulations are occasionally somewhat awkward; there is one such which stands as a blemish in the beautiful *aria* for Imogen. The lack of science, with which Bellini has often been charged, is but rarely felt, perhaps in the overture more than elsewhere, for there much good material is in one sense wasted; for example,

the chief theme of the *allegro agitato*, a beautiful melody well designed for thematic development, had Bellini the inclination or science for that branch of Art. But with all its weaknesses and its shortcomings, "Il Pirata" is a lovely work well deserving the success it gained.

Before leaving this opera it should be said that in some biographies of the Sicilian statements are met with concerning an opera from his pen, "Il Solitario," of which nothing is known but the name—a great loss if it truly existed — the belief in its composition being founded on a passage in one of his letters, where he refers to an opera of that name, composed in conjunction with Romani. But surely it was only another name for "Il Pirata," for one of the characters, Godfredo, at one time tutor to Gualtiero, is generally spoken of as Il Solitario — the Recluse — and it surely seems more than probable that at one time this was the name to be given to "Il Pirata," the libretto perhaps being originally planned somewhat differently, and that Bellini occasionally referred to it under that title.

As may readily be imagined, many of the Italian theatres wished to produce works by the successful composer, and many were the invitations he received. But Barbaja being on the spot had the first opportunity, and he was not the man to lose it. Accordingly Bellini bound himself to produce an opera the following season at the Scala, and the other offers were answered in the negative. Amongst them, however, was one from Genoa; the Carlo Felice theatre had been rebuilt, and for the reopening the Genoese had set their hearts on having a work by the new *Maestro*, and accordingly, as he could not compose a fresh work, they asked him if he would reproduce "Bianca e Fernando." To this Bellini willingly consented. The winter he spent in Milan, and the revision of the work kept him fairly well occupied, three entirely new pieces being added or substituted, two tenor airs, and the *cabaletta* of the *aria finale*—one of the most successful numbers. In the middle of March he went to Genoa for the rehearsals, Tosi, Davide, and Tamburini having the principal parts, and the opera in its revised form was first

played on 7th April, 1828. It was a great success —after the third performance the composer said in one of his letters that it "Va crescendo in Furore"—and subsequently to this was played all over Italy along with "Il Pirata," though it does not seem ever to have made much headway over the frontier, and even in its native country its life was of no great duration. Soon after its production Bellini returned to Milan, the city of which he was so fond, and which he had already learnt to look on as his home, to begin his new opera, for he was a slow worker as a rule—for an Italian.

The new work was "La Straniera," libretto by Romani—a poem not without a touch of mystery in it—founded on a novel by the Viscount d'Arlincourt, the scene of which is laid in Brittany, and which in Romani's hands became a drama possessed of some character. Bellini liked the plot, and thought it very suitable for music. To Florimo he wrote: "The subject Romani has found is more susceptible than all the others I suggested," and by the

end of June he was hard at work turning over in his mind the principal situations, studying the characters, and noting down some of the chief themes as they presented themselves to him, and by the autumn the work was well under way.

It was about this time that he published a set of six songs; they did not, however, interrupt his operatic work to any extent, as some of them were not new, but had been written while still a student. Among these will be found the *arietta* "*Dolente Immagine*"—the song to Maddelena Fumaroli's words. The poem is suggestively sad, and the music seems to speak straight from the heart in a moment of great grief. It is a beautiful little song. He dedicated it to Signora Pollini, the wife of his friend, a lady many years his senior for whom he had great affection—an affection resembling more that of son to mother than aught else. The fact of its publication, especially when the words are recalled, leads one to think that Bellini realised it was useless to hope any longer that he would ever be united to Maddelena, more especially as shortly after the successful

run of "Bianca e Fernando" at Naples he had renewed his offer of marriage. Florimo was with him when he received the curt refusal —a witness of his intense grief. Once after that he contrived to see Maddelena, and then for the last time in tears the lovers parted. This surely makes the story that nought but Bellini's pride hindered the marriage even less probable than it otherwise would be. His conduct through life bears out the line of Maddelena's song:

> "Ombra di Fillide, in pace riposa:
> É inestinguibile l'antico amor."

The set also includes the charming "*Vaga Luna*," a song one can still hear floating across the waters of Venice at evening, sung by the "street" singers of that city.

The opera progressed steadily, and by the end of 1828 it was finished, and the first performance took place on 14th February, 1829, at the Scala, with Lalande as Alaide (La Straniera), Ungher as Isoletta, Domenico as Arturo, and Tamburini as Valdeburgo.

Here was another success for the young *Maestro*, as great, or nearly so, as that attained with "Il

Pirata." The first performance was received most enthusiastically, and over thirty times he had to bow to the audience. The opera was played shortly after at Catania, and so pleased his fellow-townsmen that they had a medal struck in his honour, having on the face his profile and the inscription:

VINC BELLINI CATANENSIS MUSICAE ARTIS DECUS,

and on the other side a Minerva with the writing:

MERITAS QUÆSITAM PATRIA.

Zingarelli wrote him a letter of congratulation, so altogether he must have felt rather pleased, though it should be noted that the more one attains the farther off seems the goal that is aimed at, and the ideal of genius is probably as far off attainment as the point aimed at by mediocrity, or perhaps farther, the senses being more open to reception; and so to him the music he wrote down may have seemed poor and trite compared to the intervals and harmonies that swept through his brain, or which he could discern amidst glimmerings to be hovering over him.

"La Straniera" is in some ways an advance on "Il Pirata," especially in the matter of character and dramatic fire. It lacks perhaps something of the sweetness and grace, the beauty of melody, of the earlier work, but gains in the sureness of touch, in crispness and dramatic expression. Throughout, indeed, Bellini seems even more desirous than usual to ensure the faithful portrayal of the emotions — and dramatic truth was habitual to him—for this reason the *tempo* and rhythm is constantly changing; in many scenes the different movements succeed each other with surprising rapidity, but the result is most happy, and no feeling of patchiness or fragmentary construction is caused. The work furthermore shows great care and finish—he spent over eight months on it—and has in it a decided touch of grandeur. It shows that he was striving already after something new, that he was not satisfied merely to repeat himself. Some of the movements should be mentioned. The opening scene by the Lake of Montalino is very well depicted, though this was a comparatively easy task; the chorus of huntsmen

is rather out of the ordinary and full of character; the two *terzettos* in the first act are quaint, and abound in unexpected changes, and the first *finale*, though somewhat shorter than is usual with Bellini, is intensely dramatic.

At the beginning of the second act comes the once popular "*Meco tu Vieni*" for Valdeburgo, an adaptation of the introduction to "Adelson e Salvini," and Isoletta's *aria* with *arpeggio* accompaniment is also noteworthy, and more especially so is the quartet. The final movement, "*Or sei Pago*" is in some ways the most striking part of the work. There is in this melody a grandeur, a breadth, a freedom and dramatic intensity which makes it a remarkably fine number. When Bellini began to compose this part of the score his inspiration failed him. Read, study, and declaim the verses as he might, they suggested no musical thoughts to him; though the dramatic situation impressed him greatly; so at length he asked Romani to write fresh poetry for the scene. His friend willingly complied, and when Bellini again complained of

its uselessness he said: "Very well, then, I will write a third version."

However, when the composer said that even this would not do, the librettist had for once to confess that he did not understand what the musician required, and very possibly thought it rather hard that he should be given so much more than his share of the work.

"You do not understand what I want?" cried Bellini. "I want poetry that will be at the same moment a prayer, an imprecation, a menace, and a delirium."

And as he became excited the musical ideas too long absent flowed in to him, and going to the piano, he began to play, trying to make Romani understand what he wanted. The librettist listened, and then taking some paper began to write. At length Bellini ceased, and turning round said:

"Now do you understand what I want?"

Romani thereupon handed him the paper, saying, "There are the verses for the music you have played. Do you think I have interpreted it well?"

And so in this way the words and music of the fine air came into existence. The diction of these verses is so fine that they are here quoted:

> "Or sei pago, O ciel tremendo,
> Or vibrato, e il colpo estremo,
> Piu non piange, piu non tremo,
> Tutto io sfido il tuo furor,
> Morte io chiedo, morte attendo,
> Che piu tarda, e il non piomba?
> Solo il gelo della tomba
> Spegner puote un tanto amor."

"La Straniera" kept the stage for many years, though it soon succumbed when the tide of fashion turned against the school to which it belongs; for with all its merit it was written before the composer reached his full maturity—if indeed he did reach it before his early death—and is far surpassed by his later efforts. It has, however, a character and a value which well repays the trouble of studying it—for, alas, it can be heard no longer!

We now come to Bellini's solitary permanent failure. All through his career he was singularly fortunate with his work, considering the fickle-

ness of the public and the impossibility of judging what fate will befall a theatrical composition. This fickleness he tasted in common with every Italian composer, but in his case matters generally righted themselves pretty soon.

The history of this next work is unfortunate throughout. Thinking, perhaps, that it would be as well not to write operas solely for one theatre, he accepted an engagement to produce a fresh work for the opening of a new theatre at Parma, though it was to take place in the spring of 1829, 5,000 francs being the price of the work, Rossini, who had had the first offer, having refused. "La Straniera" was first performed on 14th February, and then only three months were left before the production of the new work at Parma, and as yet not a note of it was written. For many composers this space of time would have been more than ample, and Bellini may have thought that he too could write quickly—if so, he was soon undeceived. Then of these precious three months one was lost owing to misunderstandings concerning the libretto. A

certain lawyer of Parma, Signor Torregiani, had written a work called "Cæsare in Egitto," which the local authorities expected Bellini to set to music—the concoction of opera books seemed then, one would fancy, rather a favourite pastime with Italian lawyers. He refused; he did not feel interested in the subject, nor did he like its treatment. Torregiani did not understand his wants, and furthermore Bellini did not wish to break his connection with Romani. So he wrote to the latter, who had gone to Venice, asking him to come and write the libretto. Romani complied, but even then much time was lost in choosing the subject. Eventually they decided on "Zaira," founded on Voltaire's gloomy Oriental tragedy—a Persian "Otello," if the present writer's memory serves him correctly. How often have not composers been tempted by the glow and colour of Eastern stories, but how seldom have they been successful! "Armide," "Semiramide" and "Aida" being noticeable exceptions.

The pair arrived in Parma on 17th March, and when they at last did get there they found the inhabitants by no means over-cordial. The

mediæval pride of town against town still survived to some extent, and though it had many advantages, being in some measure responsible for the great Art wave, the Renaissance, which swept over Italy in the "Cinque Cento," it was in this case disastrous. The citizens seemed to consider it a personal affront that Bellini had refused to use the libretto by their local poet, and the intrigues which are almost inseparable from the theatre, especially that of Italy, soon commenced. Bellini could not but be affected by this state of affairs. With his sensitive temperament it was quite enough to disturb the flow of his musical ideas; so also was the great haste in which the score had to be produced, and the score when completed was unequal. The rehearsals went badly—owing probably to the scanty time available, for there were some good singers in the cast, Lalande and Lablache amongst them—and altogether it became apparent that the new theatre would not be opened under very happy auspices.

The opening of the theatre took place on 16th May, and when Bellini entered the orchestra he

was greeted by a chilly silence—how different from the receptions he was used to in Milan! It soon became evident that the audience meant to hiss the work; the performance was not good, the music did not please, and the result was a total and hopeless failure. That there was, however, some justice in this condemnation is shown by the fact that Bellini never subsequently tried to retrieve its fortunes. It was played on the solitary night of 16th May, 1829, and after that ceased to have an independent existence. The best movements, however, he saved from the disaster, with his usual frugality, and subsequently made use of. And early in June, glad to see the last of Parma, he returned to Milan, much depressed and dispirited.

VI

"I CAPULETI E I MONTECCHI"

TO those critics and biographers who love splitting the work of a man into periods and styles the music of Bellini will present no easy task; like most Italians, his genius ripened and enlarged with constant practice, and different as are "Norma" and "I Puritani" from "Il Pirata" or "Bianca," it would be difficult to lay one's finger on any one work as marking the era of a new style.

The opera we must next take into consideration is so different from what he had written before that it might assuredly be considered the beginning of a new period were it not that the preceding work, "La Straniera"—for "Zaira" must be left out of count—in its turn marks a wide departure, in style if not in genius,

from "Il Pirata." Therefore to divide his work into styles we should need almost as many periods as there are operas, and ten such in as many years would be an absurdity. Bellini's work, therefore, must be regarded as forming a consecutive chain of progress, progress either of genius or of musicianship, for in each opera he found something new to express, and in some way improved on what he had done before. His genius ripened young; in his first works there is more depth of expression, more intensity, than many a composer who has lived long and endured much has been able to infuse into his music. Some hold the idea that privations and disappointments are needed to give the artist's thought depth—labouring under the impression, it is to be presumed, that there is no depth unless it take the form of gloom and despair. But physical privations must always be detrimental to art — a jealous mistress who requires the whole thought and energy of her servant—and when reading of the poverty and difficulties that many geniuses have had to contend with, it is surely obvious that what they have accomplished

is in spite of, and not because of, what they have endured. With mental suffering it is not so easy to decide; the result depends probably on the temperament of the composer—in some it but awakes the combative instinct, others it warps, blights, and stunts. Genius is often most highly sensitive, and it takes but little to develop it, but little more to crush it. A certain amount of disappointment may, however, spur the creator to the attainment of greater things, if it come not too often, and neither at the very beginning nor the end of a career; and so perhaps the failure of "Zaira" may have had something to do with the great advance shown in Bellini's next work. An occasional check is no bad thing for an artist, and tends to prevent him becoming careless and uncritical with his work—though Bellini was in this respect never in much danger.

However, the immediate result of "Zaira" was not to urge him to fresh composition; instead it took the form of a mood of depression, and on his return to Milan he contemplated no new work for some time. So the summer

passed without anything being undertaken, but when autumn came, and with it the opera season, he was somewhat cheered by the highly successful revival of "Bianca" and "Il Pirata," and accordingly when an invitation came from Venice to visit that city and supervise the production of the latter work, he readily accepted.

He arrived in Venice in December, 1829, being well armed with letters of introduction, one of them to Signor Perruchini, a government official, in whose house he stayed during part of his sojourn, and with whose sons he formed a great friendship. Here also he found his friend and fellow-townsman, Pacini, who was engaged to write the *opera d'obbligio* for the Fenice Theatre, but who was just then ill in bed. The rehearsals completed, "Il Pirata" was most successfully played on 16th January, 1830.

By this time it was evident that Pacini would not be convalescent soon enough to complete his opera. The manager was in despair; where to get the new work which he was bound to bring out he did not know,

and the public, thinking they were going to be deprived of their annual musical event, made themselves as disagreeable as possible. At length the unfortunate Impresario sought out Bellini. Would he compose a new work? At first he refused; the opera had to be staged by the beginning of March, and this left him but six weeks for the composition, the rehearsals, and everything, and he had had enough of hurried writing in "Zaira" to last him for some time. However, the manager implored and his friends begged, and at last he consented, stipulating, however, that Romani was to write the libretto, and silently determining that he would use as much of the best parts of "Zaira" as possible. Romani consented to undertake the literary part of the work, and the pair cast about for a suitable subject, the poet having none ready—Pacini having composed some of the music may possibly have thought he had the exclusive right to the libretto he was to set. The subject of Romeo and Juliet was suggested—by whom the present writer does not know—and this pleased Bellini; one can well understand the

sympathy he would feel for those unfortunate but immortal lovers. The subject was one that suited his temperament, but it had already been set by his old master, Zingarelli, and he was very reluctant, therefore, to undertake it. Romani also liked the story, so much so that he had already written on it, having furnished the libretto for Vaccaj's "Guilietta e Romeo," and he was doubtful if he ought to treat it for another composer, or if he could do so successfully. However, it was at length decided to make the attempt, if Zingarelli and Vaccaj would give their permission. Accordingly Romani wrote to Vaccaj and Bellini to the Neapolitan—an act of courtesy on the part of this illustrious pair somewhat unusual with artists—and, both composers having willingly given their consent, the two began to collaborate for the fourth time.

Romani thought it advisable to construct the new libretto—"I Capuleti e I Montecchi"—somewhat differently to his former one, with the result that though in one or two places, the tomb scene, for example, the treatment is more happy,

on the whole the book is less satisfactory, especially in the scene where Juliet takes the philtre. The part of Lady Capulet, which in Vaccaj's opera assumes some importance, is here altogether dispensed with, and in both works Tebaldo is made to do duty for Shakespeare's Tybalt and Paris in one. The poetry, however, is satisfactory, and the work contains much picturesque colour. As a setting of Shakespeare's play it may be harshly criticised, unless, indeed, we view it—and perhaps it is fairest so to do—as a certain great critic viewed Rossini's "Otello"—"as an illustration and not as a version of that peerless work—and *such* an illustration."*

Bellini composed the score in all haste; on 5th February he wrote that it progressed well enough and that he hoped to have it staged by the 6th or 8th of March at the latest. Much time was saved undoubtedly by using fragments of "Zaira," but even then he must have found the time very short, and the happy result—how different from "Zaira"!—may very possibly have

* "Conti the Discarded," vol. ii., p. 241.

been due to the fact that he felt he was writing under what were known to be difficulties, that he was filling a gap to oblige, and that, therefore, allowances would be made, that he would be treated leniently. This knowledge may have set his mind at ease, and given his genius full sway. That the opera was not, however, a mere *morceau d'occasion* was soon to be shown; a full rehearsal of the first act took place on 3rd March, and the complete work was produced on 11th March, with Giudetta Grisi as Romeo, Carradori as Juliet, the tenor Bonfigli as Tybalt, and went "Alla Stelle."

So beautiful is this work that it is well worth while dwelling on it minutely. Perhaps the greatest of its many virtues is the splendid picture it gives of the period represented. As a piece of musical character-drawing, as picturesque historical writing, it can rank with "Don Giovanni" or "Lucrezia Borgia"—the latter having one of Romani's best libretti. It depicts the dreamy, poetical side of mediæval Italy as faithfully as "Rigoletto" portrays that side which is stern and somewhat repul-

sive—and perhaps even more so; not that it is all dream-like, for what could be more expressive of those turbulent times than the beginning of the overture or the greater part of the first *finale?* The overture is a surprisingly fine composition, especially noticeable as Bellini was no instrumental composer. It begins with a series of chords, followed by a motif from the first *finale*, admirably suggestive of the constant street brawls and quarrels which were always taking place when the Guelphs and the Ghibelines were at deadly enmity. On hearing it one is forcibly reminded of the passage—"Do you bite your thumb at us, sir? I do bite my thumb, sir"—and the scene that follows in the play. These chords recur throughout the composition, and dexterously interwoven is the melody from the opening chorus, which, though sung by men alone in the opera, is very characteristic of the *Demigelli* of the period in the picturesque, bright-coloured dresses, very suggestive of the animated movement of true Italian gaiety. It is a remarkably fine overture, and one which,

as unfortunately it is almost useless to hope for a revival of the opera, should certainly be heard in our concert rooms, though, were it played, doubtless many "Guardians of Art" would do their best to disparage it. Yet the instrumental skill required was not in the least beyond Bellini's resources, but, say what one may, abuse or no abuse, it is a fine work.

The whole of the first scene is highly picturesque. The introductory chorus is admirable; Tebaldo's air has a sweetness and charm about it (which is not in the least sickly), that Bellini in this particular vein never equalled. There are some indications of this air in his previous works. Perhaps some years ago many persons may have wished the charm had been less, for "*E Serbato*" and "*L'Amo, l'Amo*" were seized on and made their own by the hurdy-gurdys, and ground out with noble persistency! The recitative that follows, indeed the recitative throughout, is carefully written, though the modulation into the key of G major at the beginning of the *allegro* sounds rather clumsy. But, again, how picturesque and

suggestive the cries of Capulet's followers, "*Morte ai Montecchi ai Gibellini*"; and then comes Romeo's entry and *aria*, some of the poetry being here taken from Vaccaj's libretto. The movement "*La Tremenda Ultrice*" is a very fair example of how largely much Italian music depends for its effect on the way it is rendered; played over-fast,—and the natural tendency here is rather to hurry the speed—it loses all its point, whereas if taken at a moderate pace with good accent it possesses much determination and well represents the bolder aspect of young Romeo's character, the warrior being here depicted and not the lover, but the same romantic figure withal.

The scene then changes to Juliet's balcony. The orchestra most beautifully depicts the time and place; evening, in the distance the landscape of haunting beauty and purity, the glow of an Italian sunset in the sky, and old Verona stretched below. Juliet enters, and to lovely recitative, and still more lovely melody, she pours forth her love for Romeo. "*Oh, Quante Volte!*

Oh, Quante!" is adapted from Nelly's "*Dopo l'Oscuro Nembo*" in "Adelson e Salvini," with, however, slight changes in the accompaniment —here too played by the harp—which are on the whole for the better. On hearing it one irresistibly recalls the days at Naples, the circumstances under which it was probably written; assuredly Bellini did right to give it to the gentlest, sweetest, and bravest of the world's lovers.

Then follows the duet, a composition admirably expressing the emotions of these famous lovers. It has a tenderness, a sweetness, a langour, and also a certain touch of sentimentality which we must ever associate with them. It is a number full of character. The movements are much diversified and replete with charming melody; some of the episodes are most happy, as, for instance, the orchestral motif preceding Romeo's tender, half-reproachful, half-playful "*Ah, Crudel d'Onor!*" which must assuredly find the lovers in each other's arms. Then, again, highly effective is the sudden interruption by the sounds of the festive music coming from below, and in

the final *allegro*, though the weakest part of the scene, there is much persuasiveness, determination, and force, but yet admirably calculated to keep its place in the dreamy scene that precedes it and surrounds it, and not in the least does it disturb the picture or force its way crudely from the frame. The whole scene was certainly written *con amore*.

The scene once more changes to a brilliantly-lighted room of Capulet's palace, decorated *per magnifica festa*. The chorus "*Lieta Notte*" is most happy, phrases and chords being very well contrasted. The *finale* begins with a dialogue for Romeo and Lorenzo, suddenly interrupted by the shrill tones of the trumpets and the cries "*All armi*"; for report has spread, and rightly, that some of the rival house are present. The scene of tumult which follows is most cleverly described—the spirit of the Middle Ages admirably caught, for the whole *finale* is a splendid historical picture. The room having cleared itself of people, Juliet descends from the gallery; the music here is that syncopated figure which may have been suggested by the score of

Rossini's "Otello"--where in the second act Desdemona finds the Moor and Roderigo at strife. The resemblance, however, is not nearly so marked as in the last great scene of "Lucrezia Borgia," and it lends itself well to the situation: to expressing Juliet's fears, her surprise at being suddenly confronted with Romeo, and to the alternating cries and entreaties, "*Ah, Vieni,*" "*Ah, no!*" Gruesome, again, are the shouts heard outside, "*Morte ai Montecchi, Morte!*" which strike such fear in Juliet's breast. In the concerted scene that follows there are many rare details: the strife, agitation, and confusion of the oft-recurring theme, beginning at Juliet's "*Ah, fermate padre!*"; the resonant passage in which young Romeo hurls his defiance at his hereditary enemy "*Io son a te revale!*"; the beautiful, crisp harmonies at Lorenzo's "*Instante tremendo*"; the lovely quintette, partially unaccompanied, which may possibly have been suggested by a passage in the first *finale* of "Bianca e Fernando," though infinitely better treated here; at the close of which, after the accompaniment has entered, Juliet has some charming phrases, against the

background of the other voices, the act closing in a *stretto* filled with movement. Almost all the *finale* up to the commencement of the *stretto* is a fine example of that style of composition common enough with this school, more common than its detractors care to admit, in which the chief musical interest is centred in the orchestra. It is the orchestra that develops the themes, the interest on the stage lying principally in the acting; but in spite of, or rather because of, the careful and effective instrumentation the voices are not overpowered, and the balance between the two is admirably preserved.

The second act begins with a short prelude of rare beauty. But few composers could put as much expression into thirty-five bars of music as Bellini here has done. Once more it suggests Juliet's balcony looking down on the rambling roofs and crooked streets of old Verona, and again she may be fancied leaning over the balustrade, thinking of Romeo; but this time her love has yet more tenderness in it, the result of the knowledge of all he had risked for her sake, and has, too, a certain undercurrent of sadness, for she

was not sure of the result of the fracas in the ballroom.

The curtain having risen, Juliet is seen waiting for Lorenzo to bring her news of her lover. Lorenzo comes and tells her he is safe, and then follows the one scene in which Bellini decidedly falls short of the mark. The situation could have been made much of; the girl, persuaded to take a philtre that will simulate death, willing to be placed in the family vault, to be from thence rescued by her lover, suddenly, having just swallowed the draught, accosted by her father, whom, for her lover's sake, she is willing to deceive — here surely is an incomparable situation for both poet and musician! But both singularly failed. Romani hurries the taking of the draught in the most inconsequent way, and Bellini follows suit. The music of this scene falls short of the situation — the success of one or two passages, and the charm—a real charm—of the melody "*Ah no poss 'io partire*" notwithstanding. It is an unfortunate piece, the blot on an otherwise wholly beautiful work; its effect is only to be secured by the talent for acting and

the vocal inflexions of the singers—then, for the sake of the rest of the work, it can be accepted. In Vaccaj's opera the treatment is much better, both as regards words and music—especially the latter.

As the drama nears its conclusion we find Romeo waiting in a deserted courtyard of the Capulet palace for Lorenzo; the latter is late, and instead of him he encounters young Tybalt. The introduction is delightful; once more we are carried back with the surest touches to mediæval times, and the orchestral motif—*sotto voce*—that forms the chief subject of the *allegro* is the outcome of real genius. The pair are just about to get to high words when they are interrupted by the sounds of a funeral chant, and a procession crosses the stage bearing the body of the entranced Juliet—a scene for Rossetti to have painted, and which Bellini fully realises in the lovely melody of this funeral chorus, which has a fragrance so sweet—in spite of its sadness—that it is no absurdity to say that one can almost perceive the scent of the funeral garlands—one could not use the word *wreaths* of her—and this

impression is in no way weakened by the closing movement.

The *finale* of the work has sometimes been considered inferior to Vaccaj's tomb scene, by which it has often been replaced in performance. This belief may possibly have been occasioned by the coldness with which it was received on the night of its first performance, compared with the great enthusiasm that was accorded the rest of the work. But before the music of the two scenes is considered, it will be as well to point out that in the later work Romani has done himself most credit. In it Romeo's death, Juliet's death, the entry of Lorenzo and Capulet, and the close of the opera follow hard on each other with admirable dramatic effect, whereas in Vaccaj's work, if for the sake of the fine music Juliet's *aria* and the proper *finale* are played, somewhat of an anti-climax is felt—it is almost unavoidable—and if the scene terminate with Romeo's death, as it has often been made to do, then there is a lack of finality about it, especially as regards the music. In both *libretti* it will be noticed Romani departs from Shakespeare in so

much that he makes Juliet awake from her trance before Romeo dies, an alteration very affecting and quite legitimate.

The music of the two scenes can be contrasted without either suffering, in spite of the fact that "*Deh tu! Deh tu bell' anima!*" though a very pretty melody, is in no way comparable to Vaccaj's "*Ah se tu dormi*," with its harp accompaniment—the latter like a toned gold frame to a soft, harmonious picture—an air of haunting loveliness which neither Beethoven in the slow movement of the "Emperor" *concerto*, Rossini in "*Ah Matilde!*" nor Donizetti in "*Spirto gentil*" has surpassed. With the chorus at the beginning no comparison is possible, for Bellini's funeral chant proper comes in the preceding scene. Throughout the scene the construction of the two works is somewhat different, Vaccaj's consisting, for the most part, of regularly-developed pieces, while Bellini's inclines to recitative, more or less fully accompanied, gathering at the last to a regular duet—how dramatic in its terseness! It is full of beautiful details from the soft harmonies and sweet chorus at the com-

mencement to the sad chords at the close. Noticeable are the phrases for the orchestra at the departure of Romeo's retainers, leaving him alone in the tomb; highly suggestive as indicating some tragic event are the chords, with their underlying *tremolo*, as he swallows the poison—here, at any rate, surpassing Vaccaj's beautiful setting—and lovely again the harmonies and affecting modulations of the two voices in the final *duettino*.

But the charm lies not in any one part or parts. It can hardly be dissected without losing some of its peculiar qualities. The whole scene is a dream with a fragrance like that of the preceding funeral chorus, but here sustained throughout, and, as in the love duet of the first act, the dreamlike quality is never once broken—not by the orchestra as it lashes the lovers to despair, when too late they find out their mistake, nor yet again in the impetuous rush of the final *stretto*.

The scene is not treated in a way that can be considered realistic—had this been tried its charm would have vanished—liken it rather to

some incident — some fairy tale, perhaps — treasured up from childhood, robbed of its realistic details, seen now, when recalled, with something of the halo of fancy attached, but yet having the power to convince because of its underlying truth.

What portions of the work were transferred from "Zaira" cannot be said — Bellini makes no mention of this in his letters—but one would fancy a considerable part of the unsuccessful work was used, as, apropos of the temporary failure of "Beatrice di Tenda," the composer says, "La 'Zaira' trova la sua vendetta in Capuleti;" but whatever transpositions there may have been were certainly made with great success and care, for there is no mixture of style discernible in the work.

Compared with Vaccaj's opera, the Venetian version must be acknowledged to excel in picturesque colour, though Vaccaj's work is not deficient in this—witness the prelude with its bold modulations, the funeral chorus and other parts—and in spontaneity of invention. Vaccaj's opera has a fine *trio* on a situation omitted

in "I Capuleti," and of the two, perhaps the older possesses more of the classic style of finish, though Bellini has not neglected this, in spite of the haste in which it was written.

The Sicilian has followed the other two musicians in their departure from realism, which gives the part of Romeo to a contralto; and perhaps when Romeo's character is studied this will seem to be almost a necessity. Romeo is not so much the portrayal of an individual man as the embodiment, in one sense, of a certain phase of mediæval character, and, in another sense, of the lover for all ages, and this surely can very rarely, one might almost say never, be thoroughly satisfactorily impersonated by a man. The performance would not be poetical enough, it would be too individual, too realistic; but when sung by a woman all realism vanishes and the imagination of the listener is called into play — it must be remembered that Art does not speak exactly, but can only *suggest*, and therefore must fail if the listener lack imagination — and the meaning of both

poet and musician—and actress too—can more readily be understood.

Romeo is not the only character on the musical stage that has to be so treated. Romeo has many affinities with Bulwer's Adrian Colonna, and Wagner has wisely handled it in the same way. Then, again, take Orpheo; a male charmer of savage beasts and mover of mountains can never be tolerated for long. When performed by a tenor the poetry, the illusion, the possibility at once vanish; it has been tried, but always has a return been made to a contralto.

At each succeeding performance the enthusiasm grew, and after the third representation many of the audience awaited the composer at the stage door and escorted him to his *gondola*, from there accompanying him home with torches, and afterwards honouring him with serenades.

What a night it must have been! For what can exceed the charm of such a procession down the Venetian canals, what can exceed in charm those canals when daylight has departed? And water lends an enchantment, a beauty,

and pathos to music, be it even poor, and sung by poor voices, though we need not suppose these serenades were such.

Bellini received 1,500 ducats for the work, and later on Francis I of Naples sent him a gold medal, and, delighted beyond all expectation by the success of the opera, he dedicated the score to his fellow-townsmen—his staunchest admirers—as follows:

AI
CATANESI
CHE IL LONTANO CONCITTADINO
NEL MUSICARE ARINGO SODANTE
DI ONOREVOLI DIMOSTRAZIONE LIBERALI
CONFORTAVANO
QUEST' OPERA
SULLE VENETE SCENE FORTUNATA
PEGNO DIGRATO ANIMO ED I FRATTERNO AFFETO
CONSACRA
VINCENZO BELLINI.

The very thought of Bellini in Venice makes one wish that he had written an opera on a Venetian subject. Had he done so it would surely have been magnificent in colour, a worthy companion to "Lucrezia Borgia," "Marino Faliero," or the characteristic music in Rossini's

"Otello." As it is one fancies that in "I Capuleti" and "Beatrice di Tenda" there is occasionally a suggestion of *La Bella Venezia*, though nothing that in any way clashes with the scenes these operas represent, merely unconscious indications of what he could have done in that direction had he turned to it. He was too sensitive not to be greatly influenced by his surroundings, and the beauty that he dwelt amongst while writing these works made itself felt. For pure charm of melody and harmony they are unsurpassed in his compositions.

He lingered on for some time seeing the buildings and paintings—the Giovanni Bellinis, Veroneses and Tintorettes, works with which his music has much in common—and it was not till the early summer that he quitted the City of the Doges.

VII

"LA SONNAMBULA," "NORMA"

SHORTLY after his return to Milan Bellini was attacked by the dangerous complaint, intestinal fever, which afterwards proved fatal to him. As soon as it was apparent that the malady was becoming serious, his friend Signor Pollini removed him to his own house, and there the elder musician and his wife nursed him as if he had been their son. At one time the illness was so alarming that the doctors feared he would not recover, but, happily for art, this time he baffled the illness.

He was singularly fortunate with his friends, who seem throughout to have been genuine, and not merely hangers-on to a distinguished man; and, as soon as he was convalescent, another Milanese family — the Turinis — asked

him to accompany them to their villa by the Lake of Como.

Ladies' society he always liked; they gave him that sympathy, that encouragement which his somewhat melancholy, sensitive, and retiring nature felt the want of, and he corresponded with a good many, but their relations do not ever seem to have stretched beyond the bounds of friendship. Some persons, however, would have it that his feelings for Giudetta Turini were of a nature more near and close. Great friendship there certainly was, but she was some ten years older than him, and her attractiveness lay not in her person but her conversation; and how many times has not the fact of a man frequenting the society of a woman for what she can give him, for what they can exchange intellectually, artistically, been misconstrued, by persons genuine, and persons only too glad of any excuse for a little gossip! To be sure, some of his letters to her end "Il vostro affezionatissimo Bellini," but that does not necessarily signify so much in that language of superlatives.

The villa was situated at Moltrasio on the shores of the lake, and surrounded by the lovely scenery—and where can scenery be found lovelier? —and breathing the soft, pure air, he soon grew strong again. He was forbidden by his doctors to walk much, and most of his time he spent on the lake rowing from shore to shore, in watching the doings of the peasants, and listening to their songs—here he may well have found the key to the gentle music of his next opera—or, according to another lady of his acquaintance, "ai piedi della Dama del suo cuore."

From his letters to Perucchini at this time we learn that "I Capuleti" was played at Milan, and that its success there was not as triumphant as at Venice. The Milanese, he says, or at any-rate the critics, considered it inferior to Vaccaj's work; but, however unfavourable at first, the impression righted itself in the end. There was —and is—room for both operas on the stage.

As soon as he was strong enough he turned his attention once more to composition, for he had agreed to write a new opera for Milan; not, however, for the Scala but for the Carcano

theatre,* which had been taken over by a society of influential persons and put under the charge of a capable manager. An excellent troupe had been collected and two new operas commissioned —one from Bellini and the other from Donizetti.

Bellini again turned to the faithful Romani for a libretto, and "Ernani" was proposed. Bellini liked it "assai," and accordingly the *scenario* was planned and the poetry of some scenes written, and with these he busied himself while at Moltrasio.

But the work was not destined to be completed. It transpired that for political reasons alterations would have to be made in the drama, and as Romani was not willing to comply, Bellini abandoned, perhaps not very reluctantly, its composition, and it was left for Verdi—himself, in the early part of his career, how worried by the political censor!—to set the subject; and perhaps of the two musicians it was most suited to the one who completed it. The scenes written by Romani were the second

* When the present writer was last in Milan the theatre was disused. To judge from old posters outside it, it had last been utilised for cinematograph entertainments!

of Act I for Elvira, Ernani, and Don Carlo, the first two scenes of Act II, and another which is probably the fourth of the Fourth Act. These were more or less completely composed, and most of the music Bellini subsequently used; a melody in the first scene mentioned, "*Muto e deserto speco*," becoming "*Oh di qual sei tu vettima*"—the *trio* in the first act of "Norma." Slight alterations throughout are discernible, showing how carefully the composer polished and chiselled his melodies.

The time at Moltrasio must have passed pleasantly enough and very likely all too quickly, and at the end of the year Bellini returned to Milan, working at the composition of his new opera, which proved to be "La Sonnambula ossia i due fidanzati Svizzeri." Romani was well occupied that winter, for in addition to supplying Bellini's wants he furnished Donizetti with his libretto, "Anna Bolena," with which the composer first really established his fame.

"La Sonnambula" was performed on 6th March, 1831, and was completely successful. Perhaps of all his works this has proved the most fortunate, and it seems to be the one that has

survived the best—though that is not necessarily a criterion of merit. This is certain, however; here Romani entrusted the composer with one of his best libretti, and though the story had been used before for a vaudeville and French ballet, the charm of the work is entirely attributable to the Italians. More perfect sympathy between composer and librettist has never been found; nothing could be more congenial to one side of Bellini's nature—how different to that shown in "Norma"—than this charming story, the characters of which are particularly alive and convincing: The deceitful Lisa, who has, however, some little excuse for her bitterness; the Count, of rather doubtful morality but kind heart; the simple, well-meaning, but foolish Elvino, whose affections are so easily transferable, though so lovely his music that one feels bound to believe in his sincerity, that, for the time, he means those tender sentiments he expresses so deliciously; and, above all, Amina, the sweetness of whose character pleads with certainty for the success of the work wherever performed.

Bellini has been suspected of using national

Sicilian melodies in the score, and the rustic character of the music lends itself to this belief. The work is a picture of village life, so charming, so unspoilt and naïve that one almost fears it to be no longer possible. The opera has neither prelude nor overture, but all the introductory scene is most happy; there is peculiar charm in the few bars (for oboes and horns) that precede the entry of the voice in "*Tutto e festa.*" The serenade too is highly successful, the same device being here used as in Rossini's "*Tyrolienne,*" where the men sing the accompaniment, while the women execute the part which imitates the Swiss yodel. Of the next scene it has been said: "Few melodies give a stronger pluck to the heart-strings—yet wholly without passionateness, expressing merely the vibrant *joie de vivre* of innocent, love-struck, sweet sixteen—than Amina's "*Come per me sereno oggi rinacque il di!*" Here and in the foregoing recitative, "*Care Campagne,*" we have something of Gluck's tear-provoking power of expressing perfect happiness.* Charming again is the

* "The Opera, Past and Present," by W. A. Arthorp.

scene of the contract, with the exquisite duet for the lovers; there are few melodies yet born in that vein more touching than "*Ah vorrei trova parola.*" The sleep-walking scene is an incomparable example of how, with means as clear as crystal, as simple as can possibly be imagined, a situation affecting—nay, more than affecting in its beauty, in the purity of the sentiments uttered, at any rate by one of the characters—can be depicted with perfect truth. Amina, in her sleep, walks into the Count's room at the Inn, murmuring of her lover and acting over in her mind the events of her wedding to take place on the morrow; beautiful and impressive the simple phrases—the climax of the scene which represents all she holds most dear—"*Cielo al mio sposo io guro eterna, eterna fede e amor,*" and the nobleman, mistrusting himself and respecting her love, hesitates but a moment, and then flies; and, unconsciously whispering in her imagination to her loved one the words: "*Alfin sei mio, alfin sei mio,*" she sinks into a deep sleep on the bed.

The opening of the *quintetto finale* indicates a movement seized on and worked out afterwards

by many composers, noticeably Donizetti; fine is Elvino's thunderstruck exclamation, "*Cielo Amina*"; successfully is surprise represented in her waking words: "*Dove Son?*" and, a little later, "*Qui perche?*" as, crushed by Elvino's answer, she turns to her mother. The whole scene is beautifully, truthfully, and pathetically placed before the listener. It has a charm that must convince.

The opening scene of the second act is fresh, but the air, so popular at one time, "*Ah perche non posso*," depends for its effect entirely on the singer, being in itself rather trite and commonplace. In the last scene the chief motif of the quintette (*allegro moderato*) is very suggestive in its cheerful way of the little mill wheel as it turns and splashes. The discovery of Lisa's guilt is admirable, but great as the depth of feeling hitherto displayed has been, it is surpassed in the last movements. Elvino will not believe the Count's explanation as to somnambulism, when a window opens, and from it emerges Amina, asleep. How well suspense is expressed by the orchestra as she crosses the rotten bending

plank over the mill wheel! How dreamily beautiful the soft melody then played, but with "*Ah non credea*" the climax of emotion in the whole opera comes, and, at the close, so superbly lovely are the phrases, "*Ah no, no! Ah non credea, ah non credea!*" that they cannot be heard without a sob rising to one's throat and tears to one's eyes.

But the tension is over, Elvino is convinced, and when Amina wakes it is in his arms, and a bright, happy ending concludes the opera. "*Ah non giunge*" as a melody cannot be considered very distinguished, but it is forcible, and gives the singer a fine and legitimate opportunity for vocal display, and its joyousness and animation are wholly satisfactory.

Rubini was the original Elvino and Pasta played the part of Amina—a happy incident for Bellini, as she gave as fortunate a turn to his art as Rubini had done previously.

During the remainder of the year Bellini occasionally left Milan, visiting at one time Castelbuttano, but always working assiduously

at a new opera, which had been commissioned for the Scala, and which proved to be "Norma." "Norma" is undoubtedly the masterpiece of the co-workers, and never did Romani write a better libretto—some have gone so far as to consider it *the* best opera-book in existence, though this must always remain a matter of opinion.* It must, however, have caused Bellini a great deal of reflection when first proposed—much as he liked it—for it required musical treatment absolutely different from that which he had hitherto put forth. Sweet, glowing melody could but rarely be appropriately used in this work. It demanded the majestic treatment which accompanies—or should accompany—classic drama; a quality must pervade it which would awe rather than charm the hearer. The moods of nature, too, had to be depicted, and generally it called for a dignity of expression which very few musicians could give.

But Bellini succeeded completely, an example of how natures like his, tender and persuasive

* Schopenhauer considered it so. It is founded on a play by Soummet.

rather than forcible, can, by summoning to their aid the truth which is inseparable from them, rise to the occasion and depict the grandest situations, all the more impressively because of the simplicity of the treatment. Though quite individual in style, though throughout we feel his personality—perhaps even more so than in some of his other operas; there are fewer plagiarisms, too—yet in "Norma" he rose completely out of his *usual* self; much of the music has quite a different ring to his ordinary work.

Though he had not the science which would have enabled him to write compositions like the "Favorita," "Siege of Corinth," or the standard German overtures, yet the opera is prefaced by a singularly fine *sinfonia* in which he has most skilfully combined the dignity of the classic story with the ferocity discernible in the Druidess' character and the despair occasioned by the faithless Pollioni. How majestic yet fierce the opening! And in the melody for flutes, clarionets and oboes there is something of antique grandeur, especially contrasted as it is with the preceding *Tutti*, with its sombre chords for the brass instru-

ments. The close, in the major key, shows well how a movement can with fidelity illustrate two absolutely different ideas. In the opera itself it is used to accompany the flames as they leap from the altar after the Hymn of War—a sign to the Druids that the gods are with them*—whereas in the overture it perfectly prepares the listener for the moonlit sylvan scene on which the curtain rises.

The scene itself contains some of the most poetical and original music in operatic writing—where is there an opening that can surpass it? Most effective are the violas and celli (divided) and the tones of the horns; one hears the rustle of the leaves and sees the moon faintly struggling through the veil of clouds to light the dim grove of the God Irminsul. The climaxes are well considered and wrought out, and the chorus, crying for vengeance on the Roman conquerors, is impressive. Calm reigning once more, Pollioni, the Proconsul, enters, and from his conversation with his friend Flavio one learns

* This scene is omitted in some editions of the work, its introduction being of doubtful authenticity.

that he has grown tired of the high priestess, Norma, whom he has seduced, and that a lesser vestal, Adalgisa, has gained his very valuable heart, but that he dreads Norma's vengeance, and, in a fine *aria*, he tells how in his sleep she appeared as a shade and warned him of the vengeance that would follow should he betray her.

Then follows the entry of the Druids to perform their sacred rite, that of cutting with a golden sickle the mistletoe growing on the sacred oak. The chorus and march is magnificent, especially the long majestic chords that herald Norma's entry, and the recitative in which, inspired, she prophesies Rome's downfall is superb; unsurpassed in Bellini's writing. The prelude to "*Casta Diva*," when the rite is performed, the moon streaming down on the scene, has been criticised as not being up to the situation, but yet in this melody there is something very suggestive of the passionless rays of the Pale Goddess, a feeling well sustained by the nature of the instrument that plays it, the flute. Bellini is known to have been particularly careful with this scene, writing

and rewriting it until he was perfectly satisfied, and the present version of "*Casta Diva*" is believed to be the eighth, seven other melodies having been discarded as beside the mark. The *allegro* cannot, however, be considered as happy.

The wood again clear of persons and silent, the young priestess Adalgisa enters, and throwing herself on the rude stone altar under the sacred tree, prays the gods for their help and asks their pardon for her vows betrayed to a love which she cannot forget. She is suddenly confronted by Pollioni, who still lingers in the sacred wood; he entreats her to accompany him to Rome, and at the close she consents. There is much of the classic feeling in "*Va crudele*"—a quality not sustained throughout the opera—the regular yet intense melody, the figure of the violins that accompanies the voices, which in spite of its orderly form is very suggestive of the disorder and riot that exists in the breasts of both Druidess and Roman, and the closing "*Vieni a Roma*" has much of Bellini's usual persuasiveness.

The scene changes to Norma's habitation, and

the priestess, divining that all is not going well, gives her two children—the outcome of her love for Pollioni—to her friend Clotilda, telling her to bear them away and keep them hidden in safety.

The music at once takes the hearer back to past ages — for the Druids and their ways belonged to a time far more remote than their Roman conquerors, to a period of civilisation not yet satisfactorily fathomed, for they possessed a certain rude order that might be called civilisation or the striving towards such, unless, indeed, and more likely, perhaps, they were the degenerate remains, the decay, of some great nation belonging to some forgotten past—and ably is this suggested by the opening music, accentuated by the sombre colour of the instrumentation. Presently Adalgisa enters, fearing to act on her promise to Pollioni, terrified at the vows she has broken, feeling that she must tell her friend and mistress, and at her hands await judgment. She begins to narrate the story of her betrayal — the music is exquisite — and Norma, struck by the resemblance to her own

secret, is carried back to the thought of past happy and past bitter moments, dreamily musing that it was thus she was deceived and thus she too struggled; and then, not having the heart to censure where she herself has fallen, she absolves the younger woman of her vows. It is a unique situation, unlike aught else in musical drama; Bellini has made the most of it, and throughout the touches have great beauty.

Then the famous *trio* begins and Norma asks who is the lover? "A Roman," is the reply. Fearful that it is *the* Roman, she further demands his name. Then Pollioni enters, and Adalgisa says "Behold him"; and the guilty trio, all sinning, though but one can be really censured, are confronted with each other. Noticeable is the swaying, suspensive movement in the orchestra at Norma's "*Tremi tu*," and then rage getting the better of the wild and impulsive woman, she bursts forth in one of the most forcible passages in the composer's music, the anger and despair accentuated by the floridity. The *trio* that follows is highly dignified and pathetic, and at the close of the

act, following hard on Norma's imprecation at the Roman—another very forcible passage—comes the dramatic interruption of the shield struck in the temple and the voices of the priests calling Norma to attend them. So the act closes, the principal characters having realised the truth, the situation understood by the persons concerned, but the solution left in suspense.

The second act begins with a lugubrious prelude, and Norma is discovered brooding murder over her children. The mood is well expressed, and *arioso* "*Teneri figli*"—on which the prelude is founded—is a fine fragment, equalling in its terseness, yet depth, the prelude to the second act of "I Capuleti." The duet is not so successful. One would fancy that at its beginning Bellini purposed to represent Norma hardly as holding converse with Adalgisa so much as thinking aloud, as almost unconsciously uttering her thoughts. But in attempting this he has rather missed the mark, and the result more approaches sleepiness. The final movement, "*Se fin all ora*," if sung

moderato and not taken at a gallop, expresses much of the fixed purpose of the woman. The music of the scene by the lake is taken from the duet in the second act of "Bianca e Fernando," its beauty excusing somewhat the fact of its indebtedness to Beethoven.

The last scene takes place in the temple. Its treatment is masterly in the way that all the causes, the threads of the drama, touched on and partially developed in the preceding scenes, are here wrought up to the dreadful climax, dramatic event following on event with great suddenness and effect. Clotilda enters and tells Norma that Pollioni has returned, and in his desperate search for Adalgisa has entered even the precincts of the temple itself. Norma flies into a rage, and losing all control of herself, and crying for vengeance, rushes to the brazen shield and strikes it thrice. Its harsh sound echoes through the halls and is at once answered from without by the trumpets of the priests, and, to the most descriptive music, they enter and ask the meaning of the summons, but Norma, almost inarticulate with rage, answers nothing but

"*Guerra! Strage! Stermine!*" and then all burst forth in the famous "Guerra" chorus, a piece almost unparalleled for its ferocity and its semi-barbaric cries for vengeance, a quality accentuated by the monotonous drone of the bass—a composition which has been known, when political excitement was added, to convert a whole audience into shouting, screaming patriots. At the close Clotilda again enters hurriedly crying that a Roman has been caught lurking round the sacred precincts; he is dragged in, and, of course, proves to be Pollioni. At last Norma has him in the hollow of her hand for vengeance, should she desire it. The Druids call on her to offer him as a sacrifice to their gods. She takes the dagger, advances to strike, but falters, turns to the crowd, and bids them depart whilst she questions him alone. The great scene "*In mia man alfin tu sei*" then follows. It contains much fine expression; in the first few phrases; at Norma's forcible "*Tutti i Romani a cento*"; in the fine melody heard in the overture "*Gia mia poco*," as characteristic a motif as there is in the whole work; and again

at Pollioni's "*Ah l'appaghi il mio terrore.*" At the close of the scene Norma tells the Druids that instead of the Roman she submits for execution a priestess faithless to her vows, and then miserable, wretched, betrayed, caring for nought, tells them it is herself she offers as a sacrifice. The scene is treated in a masterly manner; the breathless *pianissimo* exclamation of the chorus "*Tu! Norma!*" etc., their state of mind, their bewilderment, being wonderfully expressed by the chords of the orchestra: These harmonies begin in a vague and almost aimless way, as if they could not realise the dreadful situation, and gradually as it is grasped the harmonies settle down to the dismal minor key, full of forebodings. From the brief duet that follows between Norma and Pollioni they gather her story, and she awaits her fate, hopeless of and not wishing for pardon. But she remembers her children, and in the most touching movement, "*Deh non volerli vittime,*" asks that they may be spared, the uselessness of her prayer, the inexorability of her fate, insisted on by the persistent reiterated notes of the horns. The

music works to a climax and modulates to that movement in the major, which has a most "uncanny" melody for the woodwind instruments, very suggestive of the mysterious ritual of the degenerate Druid religion.

The Proconsul, touched by the nobility of Norma's sacrifice, and momentarily influenced by her example, elects to share her fate. The music changes to the minor, a black veil is thrown over the priestess, and she is hurried off to be burnt alive; and with the furious shouts of the priests exulting over their victims, and the persistent clashes of the orchestra, the dreadful tragedy closes.

In both this work and "La Sonnambula" the hearer cannot fail to notice how successfully both poet and musician have concentrated their chief interest on the last scene. Despite the charm of the first act of the preceding opera, or the beauty of the stage picture where Norma, with the moon full on her and the kneeling crowd encircled round her, invokes the Goddess, the chief recollections of these two works are Amina crossing the rotten bending plank over the mill

wheel in her sleep, and Norma confronted with the Druids and Pollioni in the temple. This, of course, should be the case in every drama, yet very often the scene by which an opera is remembered is anything but the last. One's associations with "Il Trovatore" generally consist of the *Miserere;* the contract or mad scene in "Lucia," not the death of Ravenswood; in "Tell" the conspiracy; in "La Gioconda" the dance and *finale* in the House of Gold; in "Samson and Delila," not the mill at Gaza nor the destruction of the temple, but the end of the second act when Samson, stung by Delila's last reproaches, driven to desperation by the fact of her leaving him, hesitates, and then rushes after her into the house, stealthily followed by the Philistine soldiers, the climax realised when the woman appears on the balcony, fiendishly holding high in her arms Samson's hair.

But "Norma" is a model of construction, the masterpiece of two highly-endowed minds.

Bellini's orchestration has frequently been found fault with, and "Norma" being generally considered his masterpiece, has therefore received

much chastisement on this score. But, though the instrumentation may sometimes be thin, and, for the most part, lacking in enterprise or much imagination, it would certainly puzzle its detractors were they asked in what way this could be remedied. It is difficult to see how the music of Bellini's peculiar style would be satisfactory if treated fully and elaborately for the orchestra. Cherubini is reported to have said that he did not see that any fuller accompaniments were needed or would improve such lovely melodies. The instrumentation is quite adequate for the essentially vocal music; it sustains and contrasts the voice well, and when it assumes the important part, as in the introduction, although having no pretensions, it does what is required in a wholly satisfactory manner.* The harmonies too should be mentioned as being highly dignified throughout.

*That "Norma" would not be satisfactory if more fully instrumentated is somewhat borne out by the following, which the present writer believes to be true, though its truth cannot be vouched for. A certain French publisher commissioned Bizet to write fuller accompaniments and reinstrumentate "Norma." The composer tried, but gave the task up, declaring it to be impossible.

"Norma" was first produced at the Scala on 26th December, 1831, with Pasta as Norma, Grisi as Adalgisa, Donzelli as Pollioni, and the result was—a complete failure!

Many of the greatest works have had but a doubtful reception when first performed, and perhaps it should not be considered surprising that on a first hearing the Milanese were unable to appreciate the grandeur of Bellini's score—so different from much of the music they were used to. They seem not to have been so much displeased as utterly bewildered. The composer was astonished; he felt that it was his best work and expected great success, and was most bitterly disappointed by the result. The same night he wrote:

"My dear Florimo,—I write to you under the feeling of grief, a bitter grief which I cannot express and which you alone are able to understand. I have just returned from the Scala from the first performance of 'Norma,' and would you believe it, Fiasco! Fiasco! solenne Fiasco! I tell you truly the public have been very severe,

and seemed to come purposely to judge and condemn my poor 'Norma' with the same precipitation as that with which the Druidess herself was treated. I should not have recognised the dear Milanese who had received with enthusiasm, with joy on their faces, with warmth in their hearts, 'Pirata,' 'Straniera,' and 'Sonnambula,' and I hoped to present them with a worthy sister in 'Norma,' but unfortunately it was not to be, and I was mistaken. My hopes were false, my expectations deluded. In spite of all, I tell you, and you only, that the introduction, the entrance and cavatina of Norma, the duet for the two women, the *terzetto* that follows, the *finale* of the first act, the other duet for the women, and the *finale* of the second act beginning with the Hymn of War, are pieces of music which please me so much (modestly) that I confess I should be very happy always to produce such in the course of my artistic career. Basta! in theatrical works the public is the supreme judge. I appeal against the judgment, and I hope they will succeed in undeceiving themselves. I shall then have cause to proclaim 'Norma' the best of my

operas; if not I resign myself to unfortunate circumstances, and will say by way of consoling myself, 'The Romans hissed the "Olympiade" of the Divine Pergolesi.'

"I leave here by coach, and hope to arrive at Naples before their presences, and either myself or this letter will tell you the sad news of 'Norma' hissed. But do not grieve, my good Florimo. I am young, and I feel within me the strength to avenge this great blow. Read this letter to my friends. I like them to know the truth, whether of good or adverse fortune. Addio. . . . ."

From this it is apparent that Bellini knew the power of the work, and his hope that the public would change their attitude towards it was soon gratified, for the manager and singers believed in it, and it was played constantly in spite of its seeming failure, and even before he left Milan the fortune had begun to change. In a short time it was hailed as his masterpiece.

In a letter of his previously quoted he said that he would not return to Naples till his reputation was fully established. He now felt

that he had to some extent justified the hopes formed of him there, and he longed once more to see Zingarelli and to return to Catania to his family. Accordingly he left Milan, and arrived at Naples on the 4th of January, 1832.

VIII

"BEATRICE DI TENDA"

ON arriving in Naples Bellini's first act was to jump into a carriage and drive to the Collegio, where he was received with characteristic southern warmth by Zingarelli. The news of his arrival soon spread, the classes stopped, and very shortly he was surrounded by a crowd of admiring students, anxious to see the musician who had done such credit to the school, and who was looked on as one of the foremost of Italy's composers. He announced his intention of staying some two or three weeks, to the great delight of everyone, and that night a special performance of "I Capuleti" was given at the San Carlo.

That he was glad to visit Naples again goes without saying, but returning to a place after

long absence always has a touch of sadness; it conjures up a train of recollections. These, whether of past happiness as compared with the present or past misfortunes, are never very cheerful to the mind, and to the sensitive Sicilian Naples must have had certain associations which were still anything but happy. He was naturally melancholy, and in addition he had received a great shock in the temporary failure of "Norma," and all these causes combined brought on a severe fit of depression which neither the success soon obtained by the opera nor the adulations of the Neapolitans could shake off. He refused Barbaja's offer of 9,000 ducats, (silver ducats, it is to be supposed) for three operas, and at the end of three weeks, after having dedicated "Norma" to Zingarelli, left for Catania in company with Florimo.

The journey to his native town was little short of a triumph. At Palermo and Messina he was received with great state and ceremony, for the spirit still reigned in the South—and let us hope it does so now—that honoured Petrach with a triumph—a spirit that places the heroes of Peace

as high as those of War, and accords them the same outward honours. But these were surpassed by his entry into Catania. He was met outside the town by the Intendant, the Principe De Spalinga Manginelli (no less a person!) and the rest of the civil authorities, and driven in a four-horsed carriage through the streets, lined on both sides by the crowds of citizens, to his father's house; and even then, when the state function was over, the public was not satisfied, and stayed cheering and clamouring till he appeared several times at the window with his father and mother.

His fellow-townsmen seemed to regard him with a feeling of the greatest pride and admiration. It was no uncommon thing for him on entering a shop and making purchases to be told that on no account would any money be taken, as it was only too great an honour to be allowed to supply his wants. Even the monks paid him all the attention they could in their own quaint way.* But no amount of success ever turned his

* The monks descended from a neighbouring monastery, bringing him some little patties, of which they alone had the recipe.

head in the least, and he remained throughout the same modest, quiet, and lovable character.

Whilst in Sicily Bellini wrote one or two songs, among them "*La Malinconia*," and he projected an opera founded on Alifieri's "Oreste," attracted, no doubt, to the classical subject by the success of "Norma." Part of the *scenario* he arranged, but the work was never seriously begun, and he soon abandoned his intention. He agreed, however, to write a new work for Venice, and as the time drew near for him to depart the depression which he had not been able to throw off deepened. He had the fixed idea—only too true, alas!—that he would never visit Sicily again. His leave-taking of his family and friends was of the saddest, and as he left the town, Etna, just then rather active, burst forth in a small eruption. "The mountain too," he cried, "bids me a last farewell!"

He had passed six weeks in Catania, and on his way to Milan stayed once more for a few days in Naples seeing Zingarelli, and then returned to his favourite city, where he found Mercadante, one of the friends of his early years. They saw

each other daily, and his life resumed its normal course, with the exception of a visit to Bergamo for the successful production of "Norma," and in August he went to Venice to compose the new opera in conjunction with Romani.

We now come to an unfortunate episode: the rupture with Romani. It is unpleasant to think that there was a breach in the friendship of these two men, but unhappily it is the case. Romani, instead of busying himself with the libretto of "Beatrice di Tenda," was occupied with a love affair, and perhaps as there was a lady in the case he must not be judged too harshly. But Bellini, always in deadly earnest with his Art, not being in quite the same position as the poet, looked on things differently, and determined, when he found no amount of expostulation to be of any avail, to go elsewhere for his libretti in the future—at any rate till Romani should acknowledge himself to be in the wrong. The composer left Milan in August, but it was not till the middle of January, 1833, that he was given the *finale* of the first act.

The libretto when completed proved a rather unsatisfactory affair. "Beatrice" is little else than a feeble repetition of "Anna Bolena"—a dramatic poem anything but faultless—Henry VIII becoming Fillipo Visconti, Jane Seymour Agnese, Percy Orombello, and Anna Beatrice. The characters have not much interest. Orombello, the tenor, is a mere puppet, thrust into certain situations by the exigencies of the piece, not creating them by his actions; Fillipo is wholly brutal, having nothing to recommend him save the music he sings; Agnese might be interesting were she brought more to the front, for the charm of her first scene, the interview with Orombello, whom she loves—and she the Duke's mistress, too!—is not to be denied. The unfortunate Beatrice is the only character who can really interest the listener, and her part lacks variety. She begins by weeping, she endures every degradation, and ends by going to the executioner. The story, without being actually repulsive, is exceedingly gloomy.

It may, however, be suspected that Bellini's quarrel with his librettist was not so much

because the poem was bad as that it might have been better, and need not have been so long delayed. For it has many good qualities in spite of the defects referred to. It is easy to understand; there are a few highly-telling situations; the four principal characters all have some chance of asserting themselves, even if they might have had more and if they were rather thrust into their parts; the characteristics of the period are, as usual with Romani, thrown into strong relief, and the poetry, as Bellini confessed, is fine; "Frattanto Romani mi ha datto bella poesia."

Bellini in setting the story fully maintained the advance shown in "Norma." It has not, perhaps, quite the same grandeur that is displayed in the preceding work—the miserable story forbids it—and the two cannot be compared any more than a grandiose fresco with a beautiful easel picture. But it contains much music quite in his best vein; it shows the matured mind and the maturing workmanship, and is perhaps the most *equal* of all his works. It is almost, if not quite, on a par with "I

Capuleti" as regards characterisation—in all other respects it is far more mature a work—not so much of the persons concerned, for they are little more than puppets, but of the period. It forms a companion picture to "I Capuleti" of the lover of mediæval Italy, of a period which "was characterised," says M. Sabatier, "by all the vices except vulgarity, and all the virtues except moderation"; * the one pure and dreamy, the other sordid, full of jealousy and cruelty, yet glossed over with a picturesque charm and possessing a glamour of poetry.

Bellini never wrote more characteristic melodies than those which comprise the prelude or form the first subject of the introduction; the period, the manners, the place, the costumes are all delineated with perfect truth; the whole of the introduction is full of character; the melody for Agnese—unseen—with its harp accompaniment, is lovely; the scene for her and Orombello has great charm; the movement where she realises the means of crushing her rival—the rival of every

* M. Sabatier is speaking of Dante's century, but the characteristics had changed little, if at all, by the unhappy Beatrice's day.

mistress, her lord's wife—is very passionate. Beatrice's *aria* contains some beautiful writing, and the duet between her and her faithless husband is remarkably fine. Some harmonies should be noticed which succeed each other in harsh though not discordant succession, a device here used in a very telling manner, but often abused since Bellini's day; the chorus of men-at-arms and retainers is full of fire and snap, the orchestra playing a very important part. The *finale* begins with an expressive melody found in the prelude; it is very well constructed, and works to a magnificent close on a grandiose theme.

In the second act the principal scenes are those of the judgment and *finale*. The superb "*Juidizio*" is very impressive, and contains the fine quartette, "*Al tuo falo*"—a movement to compare with Donizetti's "*Chi mi frena*"—and that wonderful melody which suggests the days long gone by before Beatrice married the brutal Fillipo Maria, when she sat in her chamber with her first husband, Facino Cane, he listening to her lute. The close as Beatrice and Orombello

are led to torture is a touch of true poetry—and the closes are specially carefully considered and wrought out in "Beatrice di Tenda." The final scene commences with a lovely chorus of Beatrice's damsels and friends assembled to take their last farewell. It is in much the same vein as that chorus which ushers in the tomb scene of "I Capuleti," but is more developed, and dies away in the most delicious harmonies, like the cool splash of the water in the Venetian canals. The phrases for the orchestra that follow as Beatrice enters, led by the guards, amid the silence of all present, recalls forcibly Dante's lines:

> "No greater grief than to remember days
> Of joy, when misery is at hand."

The passage must appeal to all whose sense of reticence and sweetly mournful expression has not been blunted by too faithful a devotion to the violent utterances of much modern music. Let the passage—nay, let the whole opera—stand as an example that the most sad and unpleasant situations can be set to beautiful music. Modern Art decrees that in its search for what is now considered truth—which is often nothing more

than imitative realism—an ugly situation shall be portrayed in a like ugly manner. And this is but a confession of weakness on the part of the artist—that he is unable to rise above the ordinary level and invest all and everything with a halo of beauty.

The passage between the repentant mistress and the wife whose death she has procured might have been made much more of, though this would almost have necessitated a separate scene being devoted to it, and the resemblance to "Anna Bolena" would have been too striking. Romani had to vary the poor réchauffé he served on Bellini, and variations are generally for the worse. Orombello's "*Angiol di pace*," in conjunction with the women's voices and the harp, forms a lovely interlude, and the final movement, the Rossinian melody from the second act of "Bianca e Fernando," well indicates the state of mind of the gentle, dignified, and brave woman as she goes to the headsman.

The melodies of the work are some of Bellini's best; the harmonies throughout show much originality, variety, and fancy, the sequences and

contrasts both of harmonies and phrases being excellent. The construction is good. In some ways it is the composer's most musicianly work; the finish is careful, and the instrumental portion rather more important than usual. It is a work on behalf of which, were it of any avail, the present writer would put forth a strong plea for revival, but it would be to little purpose. The work is at any rate in good company, and perhaps it is a greater honour to be laid aside with "Möise," "Semiramide," "Medea," "Marino Faliero," "Don Sebastian," "Euryanthe," and other like masterpieces than classed with some of the now reigning favourites.

The first performance took place on 16th March, 1833, at the Fenice Theatre, Pasta again creating the principal part, and once more the result was a seeming failure.

Mr Marion Crawford in his charming novel "A Roman Singer" makes one of the characters say: "I used to go to the theatre myself and sit in a box and applaud or hiss just as I pleased;" that pithily describes an Italian audience, and on the night of the 16th of March, 1833, it pleased them

to hiss. Besides which it is said that a rumour had been circulated that Bellini had attended a performance of "Il Tancredi"—an opera of which the Venetians were particularly fond—and had made disparaging remarks concerning it. Nothing could be less likely, for if ever Rossini had a sincere admirer it was Bellini. But the truth of the report troubled not the Venetians in the slightest; one pretext was as good as another, and if there was none, why, then, they could quite well hiss his work without one. And so there was small chance of the opera succeeding that night.

The prelude, the lovely introduction, and the first duet passed almost unheard amidst the laughter and chatter and other polite noises which occurred to the fertile minds of the cheerful public as suitable means of killing the work, and it was not till the middle of the duet for Beatrice and Fillipo that anything like order was secured. Tradition has it that Pasta, when she came to the lines she should address to the coarse and brutal husband:

"Si non m'amar respettami,"

drew herself up as only Pasta could, and turned and delivered them to the audience. In such cases it is touch and go, quiet or pandemonium; here, for once, the conscience of the audience and the justness of the appeal made itself felt, and during the remainder of the evening the music was listened to coldly but respectfully.

Bellini had learnt a lesson from "Norma," and did not despair of success. "Zaira" avenged herself in "Capuleti," "Norma" in herself, will "Beatrice" avenge herself also? "I hope so, for I love her as I love my other children," he wrote, and his hopes were well founded. The public soon listened quietly with an unprejudiced mind, and "Beatrice," like "Norma," became a favourite.

IX

"I PURITANI"; BELLINI'S DEATH

ON his return from Venice Bellini stayed little more than six weeks at Milan, for he had received offers from far distant opera-houses too tempting to be refused. His early works had by this time travelled well round Europe, and Rossini silent, Donizetti, Mercadante, and Pacini but partially accepted, Bellini was regarded as the most promising Italian, as the one to whom the public looked most for novelties, and accordingly the directors of His Majesty's Theatre, London, and the Théâtre Italienne in Paris, asked him to come and produce his works, the English manager being satisfied with the performance of two operas already written (for 12,000 lire), while the Parisian wished for an entirely new musical drama.

Bellini readily accepted, and in May, 1833, in company with Pasta, Merie Lalande, and Donzelli, he left Milan, destined never to see it again. London impressed him greatly—the grandeur of the buildings, the number of carriages, and the luxury of the houses. "It is a magnificent city, the first of the world."

"Norma" was produced on 23rd June. "Pasta," he wrote, "is always great. Donzelli sang well enough, and the chorus not badly." Reports differ as to the result, but balancing one account against another, we may take it that "Norma" was well received, though with no great enthusiasm. As in Milan, it took some time before its grandeur and beauty was grasped. "I Capuleti" was also played for the first time in this country, and with considerable success—it gained more immediate favour than "Norma"—Zingarelli's tomb scene being substituted for Bellini's own, according to some accounts, and according to others Vaccaj's. "La Sonnambula," which had been heard before, was repeated successfully, and on the whole his visit was

artistically successful, though his real popularity in England did not begin until "I Puritani" was heard.

As usual he became a favourite in society, and made many friends. His visit seems to have been a pleasant one, so much so that instead of leaving England in August, as he originally intended, it was not till the end of the year that he arrived in Paris.

But Paris was not to his liking at first. Quiet and retiring, he felt ill at ease in the brilliant and witty society of the gay city, and he was attacked by a very severe fit of depression. He longed to be back in Milan, his "Cara Milano." "I shall be only too happy if I never leave you again," he said.

However, Paris had compensations for its drawbacks, and once more he met Rossini—who had indeed been largely instrumental in getting him the invitation to compose his opera, and who soon looked on him, it is said, as a son. Cherubini, Paer, and Carafa also became firm friends of the "gentle Sicilian," and he naturally made the acquaintance of most of the

distinguished men, then so marvellously plentiful in Paris.

Much of the music he heard was a revelation to him; Habenech and Rossini were studying Beethoven symphonies, and these were produced at the "Concerts du Conservatoire" and made a great impression on Bellini. But the work he valued above all others was "Guillaume Tell." "I go," he wrote to a friend, "to hear for the thirteenth time the divine 'Guillaume Tell,' and each time I hear it I am persuaded that the rest of us, the composers of the day, are but flies compared with the master of masters. For me 'Guillaume Tell' ranks with the 'Divina Commedia,'" and certainly its Olympian dignity and magnificent orchestration is a splendid example of the height to which genius by constant practice can attain. The effect that the superb *trio* and *finale* of the second act — that perfectly sublime union of melody, harmony, and orchestration, of inspiration and learning—that the stupendous orchestral structure, when Tell is thrown into chains, and that the close of the opera—perhaps

the most poetical ending to any work—makes on the hearer when first heard is a sensation never to be forgotten by anyone to whom music speaks; and despite his familiarity with "Semiramide" one can well understand the surprise and admiration he felt on hearing the great masterpiece.

In Paris he heard music then unknown and most probably undreamed of in Italy. The environment was totally different from what he had been accustomed to. Everything was calculated to disturb his artistic ideas and methods, and, supposing that he was on the verge of a change, of alteration in his style—which, in fact, he was—Paris was admirably calculated to give the desired impetus.

Bellini was faced with a difficult task at the outset of his work on the new opera—that of replacing Romani; and here his conscience made itself heard. "I ought to sacrifice my 'amour propre' to my art," he wrote, yet pride won the day; he determined to get on as best he could without his old ally.

But to replace him was a hard task, though there were many candidates for the office; "all the others seemed cold and insipid, and to lack real fire." However, at last he determined to entrust Count Pepoli with the task. Pepoli had written some verses which Bellini had set, the two men were very friendly, and Pepoli, though hitherto he had never written for the stage, was anxious to try, and Bellini knew he would do his best; nevertheless he must have been somewhat anxious as to the result.

The subject chosen was "I Puritani di Scozia" (the scene is laid at Plymouth !), and Pepoli threw his heart into the matter and tried his best to understand Bellini's wants and to produce a good work. "Pepoli serves me with true friendship, he is better than the others, but he is not Romani; a Romani is not easily found." In October he wrote: "The title will be 'I Puritani.' The book is not bad, but it is not Romani." In the summer he left Paris and went to Puteaux to stay with some friends he had made in England, called Lewis, and there in quiet to compose his score.

The libretto is not a very satisfactory one. It cannot really be considered an improvement on "Beatrice di Tenda," for though that work was lightly thrown off by a mind bent on other things, not caring to take real trouble, or give it true study, yet it shows the hand of the master, while Pepoli with all his desire to achieve something was but a mediocrity, and to this his poem bears witness. It contains some effective situations and the opportunity for much varied music but sadly little character. It has been said that it is difficult to understand, and dull when understood, and this is in a great measure true. However, its faults are not such as to submerge Bellini's music. It has not wrought the same havoc on his score as "Zelmira" on Rossini's, "Euryanthe" on Weber's, or Schikaneder's fantastic conglomeration on Mozart's magnificent music. But it has certainly been no help, and Bellini must have found the verse much less inspiring than Romani's fine lines. However, the desire to create was strong within him, and neither indifferent poetry nor an ill-constructed plot

could hinder him from writing a very beautiful score.

During its composition he turned to Rossini for advice with a frankness not always to be found in successful men. "Study instrumentation," was the precept Rossini had given him shortly after his arrival in Paris, and he faithfully followed it. "I am in Germany studying the effects of the orchestra," he wrote from Puteaux, and on 4th September to Florimo, "Rossini is content with the present state of the opera. . . . Carafa finds the instrumentation of the introduction and *finale* (of the first act) very good."

Whilst working at Puteaux the malady which had nearly proved fatal some years before at Milan showed signs of returning, but happily it was got under, and the opera was first performed on 25th January, 1835, and was a complete success. The performance was splendid, as indeed it could not help being when the cast included Grisi, Rubini, Tamburini, and Lablache, "Lablache la cantato come un Dio, la Grisi come un angioletto, e Rubini e Tamburini al pari," and a few months later the same quartette

of artists sang the opera in England with success equally great. Chorley says:

"From first to last note 'I Puritani' was found enchanting. . . . London was steeped in the music—organs ground it, adventurous amateurs dared it, the singers themselves sang it to such satiety as to lose all consciousness of what they were engaged on, and, when once launched, to go on mechanically. I must have heard Mademoiselle Grisi's '*Polacca*' that year alone, if once, one hundred times, to speak without exaggeration."

Donizetti, then in Paris rehearsing his "Marino Faliero," wrote to Romani: "Bellini's success has been very great, in spite of the mediocre libretto." Indeed, almost all parties were unanimous in praise of the work.

The music shows that its composer adhered faithfully to the principles he had laid down for himself after the production of "Il Pirata," that he would try to find something new. In "I Puritani" he was breaking new ground. He may have felt that he had said all he had to say in his old style, that he had developed it as far as he was able,

and that unless he was merely to repeat himself he must change his method somewhat, and so, though his melodies still have the same sweetness and charm, we find the instrumentation richer, more varied, and more fanciful—"Oh mio caro Florimo! che effetto che fa la strumentazione." The harmonies also show more desire to leave their ordinary course. Some few clumsy modulations and progressions are the consequence, for here his lack of science occasionally is felt; but on the whole the result is very successful.

It must not be thought that the recognition of Bellini's improvement in instrumentation in any way clashes with what has been said on the subject in the chapter on "Norma." "Norma" could not be instrumentated in quite the same way as "Puritani," or "Puritani" as "Norma," for "Puritani" is so designed and constructed as to lay itself open to call for more elaborate orchestration, nor must it be considered that this change in his style was necessarily progression, except as regards technique. It was merely that he expressed himself differently, having, perhaps, as before mentioned, said all he could say in his

early manner. The works, if compared, must be judged according to their respective styles, and for genius and inspiration "Norma" reaches above any other of his operas.

But "I Puritani" has its own charm. The Italian shows once more—for remember the introduction to "Norma"—how strongly the poetry of Nature appealed to him, and how beautifully he could depict it in his music. The first dim, grey glimmering of dawn and the gradual growth of the fresh daybreak are most poetically portrayed in the prelude, and again the storm that opens the last act is admirable in its cold, dismal aspect, the dreary splash of the rain brought out by its well-placed monotony—by the ground bass for the cellos and bassos—the instrumentation being exceedingly good.

Some of the melodies have great charm, "*Ah te O Cara*," for instance, and the sparkling "*Polacca*"—the gayest of his later compositions, though lacking the naïveté of the merry music of "Adelson." It is refreshing to find that Puritan maidens did not always sing the "Old Hundredth." In fact, whatever one may think

of "I Puritani" as a whole, it cannot be denied that it contains much very captivating music, including in its mad scene perhaps the most beautiful and touching of all Bellini's melodies. To quote Chorley again: "In this the largo, '*Qui la Voce*,' is more wayward, woeful, and affecting, by its intense misery, than any similar mad scene in recollection—the painful recitatives in Purcell's 'Delirious Lady' not forgotten."

The martial music too is better than such music frequently is, and has none of the vulgarity that so often accompanies it. Its worst feature is a tendency towards what is noisy. Of the *finale* to the second act—a poorly-constructed act—Rossini wrote to a friend in Milan describing the opera: "I need not tell you of the second *finale;* you must have heard it where you are."

The last act, besides the introductory storm, contains two pieces which should be mentioned: one, because it is not Bellini's own, the song describing "the life and death suspense of a lover doomed to execution, on being torn from the idol of his heart—whom misadventure has driven

mad—and whom he quits to mount the scaffold, leaving her in a swoon, which (for her sake) he would fain hope is the sleep of death," is but a plagiarism of Simone Meyer's "*Donna l'Amore*," and which shows how much, on occasion, Bellini would trust to the singer for his effects—in this to be compared with Ravenswood's last scene in "Lucia"—for intrinsically, though charming and somewhat touching, especially at the end, it is hardly equal to the situation.

But the other piece is fine; the music when Richard Fourth bids his rival prepare for death has something chivalresque in it, of one who condemns to death the enemy he yet respects. It is reminiscent of the conversation between Claverhouse and Morton on Froissart during the journey to Edinburgh after Bothwell Brig. There is more character in this than in any other portion of the opera, for the weak side of the work is the lack of the character of the period, owing somewhat to the poorness of the libretto, but probably more to the fact that the representation of Puritanism and the opposing Royalists were outside the range of Bellini's power and ken.

The *finale* may be called a piece of stage carpentry; the logical ending of the story is tragedy, yet such is the charm of the music that it seems to call for a happy conclusion, and this is attained by the simple fact that just as Artino is led off to be shot a messenger enters hurriedly bearing the news that the Stuarts have been hopelessly defeated—at Worcester, it is to be presumed—and that the Commonwealth has pardoned all political offenders—a strange proceeding in a war which was not characterised by charitableness on either side—despite the jealous Christianity of the combatants.

But all ends happily, and one cannot help being glad for the sake of the sorely-tried heroine.

"I Puritani" brought Bellini many distinctions, official and otherwise. He was given the Order of the Legion of Honour, and was decorated by the King at Naples; but—a happier incident than either of these—Romani wrote him a letter of congratulation so delicately expressed that Bellini, most probably only too

glad of the opportunity, answered it immediately, and from that time to the fast-approaching end of the musician's life their friendship was renewed, and it is pleasant to think that, had Bellini's life been spared, the world would have been the richer by another series of works from the joint authorship of these two who had laboured so successfully together. For the moment, however, Bellini continued to work with Pepoli.

"I Puritani" was successful everywhere. It was played in Palermo, and from his letters we gather that Bellini was not quite confident of the result; he feared that the libretto would hinder it. In Paris, he said, it had not much influence, for few persons understood Italian, but in Palermo it was different. There they were "accustomed to the beautiful language of Romani, clear, choice, and which goes straight to the heart." "Poor Pepoli," he wrote, "was new to the work and therefore at a disadvantage, but keep this opinion, I pray you, to yourself for fear of offending the author, for like all authors he thinks his work perfection." But it met with

its usual approval at Palermo, and indeed had more immediate success than any of his works.

Naturally this brought the commission of another opera for Paris, and he seems to have been in a more cheerful frame of mind than he had known for some time. His depression had gone, and his letters were full of hopes and plans for the future. In the next three years he contemplated composing three if not four new operas — one at least for Paris and two for Naples. "Naples will give me 45,000 Austrian lire, which will be 9,000 ducats. . . . For Italy the contract is superb."

Most interesting is a letter to Ricordi concerning his business arrangements. He did not wish to be paid exorbitantly, he said, but he asked higher prices than other composers of the day, because he worked more slowly. They would turn out four operas a year whilst he wrote one, and he felt that he could not do himself justice when writing rapidly. This he maintained in spite of the success of "La Sonnambula," the rapid composition of which he considered rather in the nature of an accident.

Shortly after the production of "I Puritani" he left Paris and its gay society and returned to his friends at Puteaux to continue his labours. There were three subjects on which he meditated composing an opera, and all of which were afterwards used by composers of one nationality or another—the themes which became Maria di Rohan, Gustave III (un Ballo in Maschera), and Rienzi, the work which made Wagner famous.* Had he lived he would probably have set them all, and on the last he seems actually to have commenced working, for years after his death Pepoli wrote to Florimo to ask if any trace could be found of some fragments of a libretto, "Cola di Rienzi," which he had given to Bellini, and as nothing could be discovered it is impossible to say how far the work had proceeded. But had it been completed, surely it would have been very fine. The subject was one which must have appealed strongly to him. He had shown in "Capuleti" and "Beatrice di Tenda" how beautifully he could portray mediæval Italy,

*Wagner's "Rienzi" is founded on Bulwer's novel, which did not appear till a few months after Bellini's death, but Miss Mitford's tragedy had been out for some years.

and after "Norma" there is no reason to think that the grandeur, the size of the subject would have been in any way beyond him. Had he lived to complete it he might have surpassed all that he had hitherto done.

Bellini worked steadily during the summer of 1835, presumably at "Rienzi," and was in very cheerful spirits, when suddenly he learnt from Florimo the sad news of Maddelena Fumaroli's death. There perished any lingering hopes he may yet have held! and once more depression and gloom overcame him, and to his friend he wrote: "Thus all things pass in the world of dreams. . . . It seems to me, and I tell you with a shudder, that it will not be long before I follow to the grave the poor girl who is no more, and whom I loved so much." His health, like his spirits, suffered, but still he worked on, and occasionally would go to Paris for a day or two, and was to be met at society gatherings in the evening. On one occasion—the last—he was at Prince Belgiojoso's, and had been accompanying his host in a song and playing himself, when he was accosted by

Heine. Bellini was never thoroughly at his ease in Parisian society, and Heine, with more wit than good taste, took a delight in making him feel uncomfortable. The poet approached him as he was seated at the piano, and bade him prepare for an early death. Most geniuses died young, he said, and cited Raphael, Pergolesi, Mozart, and Byron as examples. The superstitious Sicilian was terrified. Pale and trembling, he rose from the piano, and making with his fingers the horns to exorcise the evil eye, left the room, and returned at once to Puteaux. In a few weeks he was dead.

Working assiduously at his opera, he was again attacked by his old complaint. On 2nd September he wrote that he had been ill for three days, but was now much better. However, the illness came on again, and the doctor at once ordered him to cease from all work, and forbade him to see anyone, but these precautions were in vain, and he rapidly grew worse.

As soon as the news spread many people came down from Paris to inquire after him, but all were refused admittance. Four times Mercadante,

one of his oldest friends, unsuccessfully tried to see him, and Carafa, determined to gain admittance, disguised himself as a specialist sent from Paris, and was admitted to Bellini's room before the mistake was discovered. Rossini, not satisfied with the reports that found their way to Paris, took up his abode in Puteaux so as to get the latest news.

By 14th September he was dangerously ill, and in his delirious moments fancied he was attending a successful representation of his latest works. When conscious, he continually asked that his mother and Florimo might be sent for.

He realised that death was near, and from his last utterances that have been preserved it is sad to think that he died with a feeling of gloom and despair. He was afraid of being forgotten. "Perhaps some day they will hear my music without even saying 'Poor Bellini.'" At one time the disorder seemed to lessen, but his strength gave way, and on 23rd September, 1835, Death laid his hands on him.

All that could be done was done to

honour the remains of the departed musician. Rossini — whom he had made his executor— Paer, Carafa, Cherubini, Panseron, Habeneck, Rubini, and one or two others formed the committee in charge of his funeral. He was buried in the cemetery of Père la Chaise, Paer delivering the funeral discourse, and a requiem service was held in the Church of the Invalides, in which the greatest singers of the day took part, the "*Lacrymosa*," sung unaccompanied by Rubini and Ivanoff, being adapted from the tenor melody in the last act of "I Puritani."

"On the eve of his funeral the Théatre Italienne opened for the season with 'I Puritani.' The performance must have been a sad one, and not many hours after its conclusion the artists who had taken part were repeating Bellini's last melodies, not to the words of the Italian libretto, but to the Catholic service for the dead."

Readers of this book—which the writer fears is quite unworthy of the memory of the genius it concerns—may very possibly, and with some reason, complain that a full portrayal of the

composer's character has not been attempted—that these pages have been perhaps too largely connected with the art of the musician at the expense of all else. But let those who would understand the charm, the truthfulness, and nobility of Bellini's character turn to his music. There they will find it put forth, for those willing to decipher it, far better than the writer could ever hope to do; for if a man's art is sincere—and that Bellini's was sincere there can be no doubt, for no insincere work could have lived as his has done—his character is fully reflected in his work, and especially in the spontaneous music of Italy.

By studying and brooding over his work they will come to grasp his aims, to sympathise with his ideals, and to understand the character of the Sicilian himself.

X

CONCLUSION

THE last chapter of this book cannot be altogether cheerful to read, nor is it so to write. A certain sadness is inevitable. To those who strive to look at Art with broad minds, or to be grateful to the creative geniuses for what they have given to the world, a summary, however brief and incomplete, of Bellini's work, his ideals and attainments, must bring some regret—to those who dearly love Art a feeling somewhat deeper—for it is impossible, in writing this chapter, to forget or ignore the bitterness with which the school to which Bellini belongs has been attacked and pursued by those who would have the world believe that they are the guardians of Art, the champions of its dignity and purity.

Though most people in authority possibly think otherwise, surely it was a sad day for the fair name of music when a school of musicians, having amongst them more than one composer whose genius should have made him tolerant of others' work, took up their pens, did all in their power to denounce the schools to which they did not belong, to proclaim the music, and the men who wrote it, shallow and insincere. In their wake many have followed, and even now, though the music of the purely Italian style has possibly seen the chief day of its glory, one constantly hears sneers and abuse administered, contemptuous criticism written by those who, like the celebrated personage in the Scriptures, thank their (musical) gods they are not as other men.

So before considering Bellini's specific attainments it will be necessary to examine the aims of the school to which his music belongs, and to review the objections that have been raised against it. And these latter seem to be the following:

Firstly; that the musical sense has advanced

since that time; that the ear, and through it the mind, can take pleasure in and understand sounds then meaningless, or which were avoided as being directly contrary to the aims of the science of music; and that therefore, to take a rough comparison, the music of that day—or rather that school—bears somewhat the same relation to the present as George Stephenson's locomotive to the shining piece of mechanism which now daily draws the Scotch Express.

Secondly; that the forms within which Bellini and his school worked are intrinsically unscenic.

Thirdly; that dramatic truth is constantly sacrificed to vocal display, and that the actual performances are therefore apt to be inartistic on account of the encouragement the music gives to the "star" system.

And fourthly; that the musicians of that school, for the most part, lacked an extended knowledge of the science of their art.

Now to examine the first of these charges—that music is progressing. What the future will bring forth none can say for certain, and therefore it is asserted with considerable show

of reason that as music, the youngest of the arts—being but four centuries old, if its modern beginning be *roughly* placed at 1500 A.D.—has made such rapid progress in so short a time, we may surely look for a great step in its evolution in the future; in fact that we are but "on the threshold of music."

At first this seems reasonable enough, and that it is not so cannot be proved. But, music being the youngest of the arts, we can turn to her elder sisters for comparison; for surely it is highly probable that as they have developed so will she also. And the result of the comparison; does it bear out the theory of the constant progression of art?

Certainly not.

Modern music may be roughly taken to be 400 years old, and if the beginnings of modern painting are placed at 1250 A.D., four centuries brings the art down to 1650, that date corresponding — in point of time — in painting to 1900 in music. How has painting progressed since then?

It would be dangerous to assert that it has

progressed at all, for all the principles that now govern the art were then fully developed. Nothing has been added since to the knowledge of composition, drawing, or colouring; little to their combination. All that at first appears to have been evolved is the branch of modern landscape and open-air painting, the art of Turner and Whistler. And yet their work is but an adaptation to the necessities of the day of the principles used for other subjects by the old masters. Modern surroundings not presenting the same tempting and artistic appearance to the eye that those of the time of the Renaissance did, the painters of to-day have turned to those things which appear as naturally beautiful to them as the everyday costumes did to the Venetians—the fields, the skies, the mists, the first gleam of the sun on the dewy meadows, or even the most commonplace surroundings when transformed by the magic of the night.

But the principles were not new; they were all known before. The only novelty is in the view taken of Nature, which must always be changing as different artists turn to her. And even then,

in acknowledging the originality of the modern branch of art—at least of its view of Nature—one must not forget the lovely landscapes in Tintoretto's pictures. Their view of Nature is not quite the same as the modern, but, as landscapes, they are as true and as beautiful.

But in painting there are persons who have tried to go beyond Turner and Whistler, who, reading their teaching wrongly, have heralded them as the bringers of an era of emancipation from all rules and standards, and have let their fancies and wishes run riot, unchecked, obeying no law but their own sweet wills. The result must be common knowledge to all who take an interest in painting. Pictures now are painted, hung in galleries, approved of, and bought, that have the worst and most ugly composition—or none at all*—having no pretence at any technical attainment save the (more or less) correct relation of the values and the boldness of the handling; no picturesqueness, no poetry in conception, let alone any originality that is

*The present writer remembers seeing a portrait hung in a gallery in which the top of the man's head ran out of the top of the canvas.

not mere eccentricity, a phase to compare in much of the music now composed, to the submersion of all other interests and qualities to the attainment of "tone colour." Tone colour and values play a very important part in great works of art, but yet, when rendered almost the sole interest of a composition, cannot save it from being stamped as otherwise than ephemeral, as misdirected energy belonging to a period of art that lends itself easily to exaggeration.

Surely this points to the fact that the boundaries—not to be confused with forms or rules, which sometimes become pedantic—of art are finite; that, for a production to be art, it must stay within those boundaries, and that if they are overstepped the work, as art, has no existence.

Take the paintings referred to; it must be apparent to any unprejudiced observer that they overstep the boundary line. The public sees them, and often laughs, for once being right, being able to see the absurdity which the creators cannot see on account of their earnestness. In music, however, matters are somewhat different, for the

sense of the ear is less usually, and therefore less readily used than that of the eye, and the absurdities of the music which has overstepped the mark are less apparent than those of the paintings. Music is harder to grasp and comprehend, and when one cannot quite understand one is apt to say nothing for fear of being thought ignorant.

But that the tendency of much, though not all, of the music of to-day is to overstep the boundaries of art is surely apparent.

Comparisons with the other arts all bring about the same results, though the origin of these arts may not be so easily traced. He would be a bold man who would assert that the poetry of the last two hundred years is an advance on that of Milton, Shakespeare, or Dante, and a comparison between these giants and the finest literature of the Romans and (more especially) Greeks would take much deciding.

In sculpture it cannot be said that the centuries which have passed since Phidias and Praxiteles have been productive of any evolution in that

branch of art. Works as fine may perhaps have been made when a genius equally great has arisen such as Michael Angelo, but it is impossible to point to a single instance of the boundaries of sculpture having been enlarged.

But let it not be thought that the present writer for a moment wishes to deny progress to the art of the human race. It is, however, not exactly the art which progresses and improves so much as the worker in that art. As the human mind ripens and enlarges the artist will infuse more beauty, truth, meaning, variety, and power into his work than the greatest creators of the past, the greatest creators who have hitherto wrought, have done, but one would fancy that it will probably be without overstepping the boundaries as laid down by the great masters of the past; and if it should be that the real extent of these boundaries has never yet been reached — and this is, of course, quite possible, even probable — the search for them must be conducted on lines consistent with the developments of the past, and which shall not be, like much music of the hour, the very negation

of all that ordering of the disorderly sounds in Nature which has ever characterised the endeavours of the really great musicians.

And now to meet the charge that the forms of that school are intrinsically unscenic.

Within the confines of art there are many different styles and modes of expression, and it is impossible to say that any one is canonical. Gluck's writing differs from Weber's or Bellini's, and Bellini's from Meyerbeer's or Verdi's ; but who can say that one is truer than the others? The present writer believes the truth to be that once the means of expression—that is, the art—has been developed to such a state that the artist *can adequately express himself*, then there is no such thing as progression (in point of merit) of the forms of art, the value being determined merely by the genius the artist puts into his work, and the changes being attributable to the fact that each age cultivates that aspect of art which is most sympathetic to it, for the ever-changing mistress presents herself in a variety of ways to her followers. The art of one period is therefore as great as that of

another, provided that the aims and ideals are equally high; the same truth is viewed from a different standpoint, and that is all. It must, however, be said that the art of some periods is more open to exaggeration than that of others, owing to general influences and tendencies which though actually outside art cannot but influence it; the spirit of the day makes itself felt everywhere, and again the same amount of genius is not always present. In making comparisons we must take examples which will represent a period at its best. For instance, a certain period of French art should not be represented by a canvas by Boucher, but by a work like Watteau's "*Embarquement pour la Cythère*," for that picture contains the ideals, in as near perfection as possible, that the other artists of the period were striving to attain. And so, in the opinion of the present writer, the aims and tendencies of the music of to-day are shown at their best in such works as Signor Boito's "Mefistofele" or Verdi's "Otello" and not in some of the would-be sermons in sound by our present-day musico-philosophers!

To judge, therefore, the music of Bellini's epoch from the same standpoint as that which preceded it, or that which is in vogue to-day, is an absurdity. The mode of expression is entirely different, but it is just as dramatic. There is as much rage in Norma's "*Vanne si mi lascia*" as in Armida's last outburst or Otello's spasms in Verdi's grand score.

It has often been urged that the repetition of words, the lengthening of syllables, and such like devices hinder dramatic truth. But those who consider that Italian opera approaches too closely the sailor's definition of an anthem must remember that opera, by the very nature of its existence, can never be made realistic, and that the words must to some extent be sacrificed. In concerted music it is very seldom that the words of all the different characters can be followed, not even in the best written pieces—for example, the "Rigoletto" quartette—but what music can and does do is to present faithfully the emotions of the personages and the actions of the drama. And these two qualities are surely the essence of dramatic truth, and any music

possessing them must be satisfactory, even if occasionally the exact words and syllables are somewhat sacrificed.

In musical drama something must be sacrificed, either the words, the music, or both. At the present day the text seems of paramount importance, music being the handmaiden of the drama. But surely if the words are to be of chief importance they had better be spoken and not sung, for they will be better heard and understood. The present arrangement cannot be considered very satisfactory for music. Surely anyone at all conversant with modern opera must know that frequently a too faithful following of the details of the text—its explanation line by line, almost syllable by syllable—has led to the nearly complete evaporation of all musical interest. The older musicians only sacrificed the text when necessary; they did not do it callously, but merely when they had good reason for the sake of the musical aspect of the work, and in situations where it was allowable.

Let it be remembered that there must not only be imagination in the mind of the composer, but

also in that of the hearer, if it is to be understood at all. In fact the value of a work of art relies largely on its capability for bringing the imaginations of the hearers into play. There is an untold and unexplored world lying behind a suggestion, whereas a realistic statement after a time ceases to have interest and passes from the memory.

Beatrice singing a beautiful melody just before she goes to her death may not be realistic, but yet it is true, in just the same way as Shakespeare's plays are true. We do not meet philosophising Hamlets, nor do men in similiar situations utter the magnificent language of Othello, but these portraits are true, if ever truth was written.

If this be granted—and such matters cannot be proved like a proposition of Euclid, but rest more on opinion—it would be hard to deny the dramatic value of Bellini's music—should anyone wish to do so—and perhaps of the many composers of the school to which he belonged, he, more than all others, searched after dramatic truth. His method of composing is interesting,

and conclusive as to his aims—for results, of course, nothing but a work itself is conclusive. Happily he has left it on record:

"When I intend to write a score—never more than one a year—I bring to bear on it all my energy. Persuaded as I am that a great part of the success depends on the choice of an interesting subject, on the contrast of the passions, the harmony of the verses, and the warmth of the expression no less than the theatrical situations, before all it is necessary to choose a writer well versed in this branch, and that is why I prefer Romani to all others. Great genius, created for the musical drama! His work accomplished, I study carefully the characters of the personages, the passions that dominate them, their sentiments and their minds. This being done, I try to place myself in the position of each and to understand what they would feel and express, knowing that music results from a variety of feelings and that passion can be expressed in many different modifications, and I try to attain this by incessant observation and to bring to the

aid of my art the manifestation of different sentiments.

"Shut in my room, I commence to declaim the parts of each person of the drama with all the heat of passion. I observe as much as possible the inflexions of my voice, the haste or languor which the situation demands, the accent, tone, and expression of the person filled with passion, and I find the motives and musical rhythms appropriate for showing this and transmitting the harmony (of the sense). Then I write these on paper and try them at the piano, and if I find that they correspond with the emotion that I feel, I judge that I may proceed, but in the contrary case I recommence and return to the work." *

The dramatic situation was the first consideration with Bellini, and far from letting the voice hinder him in his expression, he understood so well its particular qualities and capabilities—which with some composers has at times led to a sacrifice of dramatic truth—

* The above translation is rather stiff—bald, one might say. It is, however, translated not from the original Italian but from a French version, and it may be that in the double translation the grace of the original has oozed out.

that he made it serve his ends; airs of display he introduced, and very rightly, when the situations allowed it, as, for instance, "*Casta Diva*" in "Norma" and the "*Polacca*" in his last opera; but when they seemed to him inconsistent with the development of the plot he would never introduce one. Writing to Florimo concerning "I Puritani," he said of one of the scenes, "I have not written a *cabaletta*, because the situation does not call for it," and in "I Capuleti" there is not one air that can properly be termed an air of display.

But the singers had no need to wish him to write pieces specially designed to show off their voices, for the whole of his music, florid or otherwise, does this. Like Rossini he could use floridity for dramatic purposes, as in Norma's outburst of rage; and always does he bring out the most touching qualities of the voice.

And this has encouraged the "star" system! It is difficult to understand the point of view which deplores the existence of star artists, and which places the performance of a company of

moderate though equal performers artistically higher than that of a company having one or more "star" artists, and the rest as good as the Impresario can see his way to obtain.

In the first instance the defects of each member of the company may not be so noticeable, for no one sets a level which the others cannot attain, but because defects are not usually noticed, it does not follow they are not there; an acute observer will see them, and the artistic superiority of such a performance is a very doubtful matter, for in the other case at least one person's performance reaches a high standard, and the other members of the company by being brought in contact with someone perhaps possessing genius are spurred to do their utmost, and at times seem temporarily to catch some of it, and to perform far better than is their wont.

In reality if one reads the accounts of operatic performances in this country sixty or seventy years ago it will be found that more frequently than not the artists were pretty much on a level, but that that level was generally of the highest—remember the quartette, Grisi, Rubini,

Tamburini, and Lablache—in fact, that one of the modern requirements of an artistic performance was realised, and for the fact that such an assemblage of performers can scarcely be accomplished now, the present day has nothing but itself to thank. There are as good voices now as ever, but no encouragement is given to the singers to train the voices, to study as the singers of bygone days studied; rather do they receive the reverse. It must, however, be noticed, in passing, that many who condemn the system of the past are only too glad, and quite rightly, to have modern works performed by the best attainable artists, the "stars" of the present day, even if the cast is therefore of not equal merit. It is but the past that gets the abuse.

The singers of Bellini's day have often been accused of caring little for the dramatic side of their art, and only for vocal display—encouraged, of course, by the composers! Nothing could be more untrue. Read any memoirs of the time and one finds that acting as well as singing was held in the highest esteem. Rubini, it is true, was no actor—it was the beauty and pathos of

his singing that earned him his fame—but Pasta is chiefly remembered for the marvellous dramatic impersonations, her voice not possessing much charm naturally, having been rendered flexible only by the most indomitable perseverance and unwearied study. Grisi is remembered both for her singing and her acting. And supposing that this accusation was true, how is it that Ronconi ever became famous? His voice was small and poor, and his execution but moderate. It was by the genius which he threw into his reading of the music, by the earnestness of his dramatic impersonations, that he rose to the height he held. And this would not have been possible had the audiences cared for nothing but "ear-tickling" melody sung by "nightingales."

When considering the technique of this school it must be borne in mind that their labours were almost entirely confined to opera, and that, for the most part, in dramatic works clearness of expression is indispensable because of the rapidly-changing emotions of the scenes. This is best obtained by simplicity of construction, and therefore many operas of that school give but

a poor idea of the range of technique which the musicians had at their command to use when they thought fit. Rossini's best operas do give an idea of his technical attainments, but neither "L'Elisir d'Amore" nor even the larger part of "Lucia di Lammermoor" indicate that Donizetti possessed the science necessary for writing the "Linda" and "La Favorita" overtures, or the "*Miserere*" composed for Vienna.

To enter fully into the technical attainments of the school would take too long—almost every composer would have to be treated singly, and that would be out of place in this volume. But one thing may be said in general before Bellini's music is considered; the simple style of that school requires a treatment of its own which can only be arrived at by study and practice. Many composers who could write music in complexity far beyond Bellini, or even Donizetti, might fail utterly, and have done so, in attempting the clearness necessary for the stage. Then the study of the voice was the great speciality of the school, and music at once

vocal and dramatic was the result—the skill with which they combined, for dramatic purposes, the vocal parts is excellent, rarely equalled. Furthermore they understood as has seldom been understood since, the proper relationship between the voice and orchestra. Had they allowed the complexities of the accompaniment or the orchestration to surpass in importance—except on occasion—the voice, they would have been working in direct contradiction to what they evidently believed to be of fundamental importance in opera.

And surely in drama—for opera is but sung drama—it is only right that the chief interest should be with the persons concerned in the drama; it is only right that they should play the important part in explaining their own actions, and furthermore of simultaneously showing the beauty of their voices, not only merely for the purpose of displaying the voice, which is—or should be—a recognised branch of art, but because the simplest and the truest expression is attained in that way. Turn to any of the great opera composers and one finds

this is so — to Gluck, Mozart, Weber, or Rossini. In a violin concerto one does not grumble because the violin is given the important part, or because that part has florid writing in it, even though the orchestral portion be most highly developed, as in Beethoven's concerto, or slender, yet beautiful, as in Spohr's "*Scena Cantate.*"

That a period should deny art one of its attributes, patiently acquired, would seem unlikely, impossible; yet that is just what is being done at the present day. It is now the tendency of a large section of musicians to dispense with all vocal ornamentation, all vocal graces; in fact more, to write music not suitable for the voice, though they now most carefully study giving the various instruments in the orchestra their appropriate phrases. For the painter to restrict himself in his colouring, to deny himself the grace given a picture by pleasant handling, to condemn himself to the use only of a palette-knife in putting on the pigments, were as sensible; and what would be said of a poet who denied the value of

appropriate periods? Yet this principle is not only tolerated in music, but, by a large section of musicians, the press, and the public, lauded and extolled as the purging of vocal art from its debasement. All this merely because a few inferior composers misused vocal ornamentation! An opera must, nowadays, have the construction of a symphony, and if the symphony has not the dramatic meaning of an opera, such is speedily found for it by the writer of the analytical programmes. It is well if the symphony have, where appropriate, something of the direct expression (not construction) of a true vocal piece; it is well if the opera has the fine instrumentation of the symphony—at times even something of symphonic construction—but if each has not its own particular qualities it will not last. Works written on false principles may endure for a time; the modern system of puffing or depreciation—as the case may be—may keep them going longer than they otherwise would, may give them a semblance of life—spun out beyond its deserts—but time must work its will. This is why so many—though again not all by

any means—of the works of the present day, of a period so open to exaggeration, in spite of much cleverness, enormous pretensions, and some real genius, will not last.

And now to come at last to Bellini's music. It must be confessed that his technical acquirements were slender—even for the school to which he belonged. One need only compare the fine quintette in the second act of "Beatrice di Tenda" to Donizetti's "*Chi mi frena*" to see how he fell behind the latter composer in vocal combination, and yet got his effect. All his expression was of the simplest, simple in conception and simple in execution; his orchestra, too, when it has to express aught, does so in the same simple, direct way. He is an example in music—and Rossetti is a like one in painting—of an artist possessing but very limited technical attainments expressing himself through them and in spite of them, in a way that leaves no doubt of conviction by the force of genius, and keeping within them, either because of the realised necessity of so doing or from natural inclination. For it is surely a peculiarity with Bellini that,

whatever he had to express, of the moods of nature or of human passions, however subtle these might be—and there is some very subtle writing in his work—he was able to do it in the simplest way. One is tempted to say that, for his purpose, his limited technique sufficed—at the start of his career it certainly did; when it must be recalled—and this is no contradiction to what has been said before—that a mastery over the more complex forms of art brings a sureness of touch to the possessor's simpler works, if he undertakes them seriously and continuously; and this is why—leaving all questions of genius aside—Bellini's music has not the same feeling of *Maesteria* as equally simple movements by Rossini or Donizetti, except in some few instances, as the introduction in "Norma." Furthermore, a command of the varied resources of art lessens the likelihood of repetition and monotony, and Bellini, conscious perhaps of this danger, showed strong indications at the end of his career of a wish to break away somewhat from his old path and produce works which, if not finer productions, would certainly not be

repetitions of what he had already written. Here his lack of technique would have been felt, unless, and this is highly probable, like Rossini, Donizetti and Verdi, he had enlarged his science as he felt the necessity for so doing.

Slender as may have been his technical acquirements, his music can rank as some of the most beautiful and worthy that has been produced. In the two main requisites for a great work he succeeded; with the truest and most unerring instinct he dived to the bottom of the situation to be represented, and in his expression cast, as has been said before, a halo of beauty over all. His operas are best looked on as a whole; the truth of the characters of persons, place and time—unless it be the Roundheads and Cavaliers—is seen, and the beauty and sincerity of his illustration of the drama is grasped. His melodies, though they have not always the fancy or variety that some other composers have been able to impart to theirs, pluck the heart-strings as do no one else's. His harmonies are usually but frames—albeit gold frames—to the more directly expressive parts of the score;

they take the character of the scene, they accentuate it, they support and augment it most beautifully, but they rarely dictate how the music shall flow, as, for example, does the beautiful harmonic treatment of the melodic subject that closes "Guillaume Tell." The directness of Bellini's expression has never been exceeded, but it would be very wrong to despise the setting or to think that there is no beauty or fancy therein, for there is much—to those who will look for it. One thing else should be mentioned — his recitative. The greatest master of this branch of art is Gluck. Mozart and Rossini on occasion approach him, and Bellini, though his flights in this direction are never so sustained, can in the truth and beauty of his declamation bear comparison from which he will not suffer — Imogen's recitative, the scene where Norma quells the Druid revolt, where she prophesies the destruction of the conquerors that so oppress her race, perhaps some parts of "Sonnambula" having the greatest purity in expression — dignified, calm, not spasmodic, having, as true recitative should,

the balance of phrases which only comes from power as a true melodist, and also that quality so peculiar to Bellini, sweetness not out of keeping with dignity. Since his day fine recitative has grown scarcer and scarcer, the declamation suffering through the lack of the cultivation of melody.

It only remains now to close the chapter, and with it the book. Bellini possessed all the qualities which contribute to greatness—as it may here be judged—though as an artist he was incomplete. He felt deeply and nobly, and sought to express himself truly. "Truth will always answer the appeal of truth," and there is that in his music which must find a response in all to whom that which is simple in art yet speaks. The exact place that Bellini occupies on Parnassus must remain a matter of opinion, yet surely it is impossible to deny him a very high position. It would be difficult to say that he does not rank with the greatest names in the art of all ages and countries on account of two of his works at least — the grand score of "Norma," and the creation of one of the most

charming, sympathetic, and lovable of heroines, Amina.

These should entitle him to that rank, even if he never put forth such compositions as the *finale* to Beethoven's fifth symphony or the second act of "Tell," which stand forth from music, as Michael Angelo's Delphic Sybil or the central figure of the "Last Judgment" in the Sistine Chapel from Fresco, as works supreme.

THE END

APPENDIX

APPENDIX

In the foregoing pages mention has been made of several musicians, now little known, of whose works some short account may be interesting, as far as space will permit, such as Mercadante, Pacini, Petrella, and Ricci.

Of these, in his lifetime, Mercadante achieved most fame, and some half-dozen of his operas have been tried in this country, though only one, "Il Guiramento"—founded on Victor Hugo's "Angelo"—ever became really popular outside Italy. To go into his music, even in the most sketchy way, would take too long, for, like most Italians, his talent was many-sided, and his successful works included, besides serious and comic operas, a great mass of sacred music, some of which, such as his "*Miserere*," is still played in Italy.

He aimed at continuing the traditions of the old Neapolitan school, and with its glory his name is connected—as its last representative. He set all the favourite old subjects, some very finely too, such as "Gli Orazi," "Medea," "Olympiade," etc. Most of his music, however, has not lasted, in spite of its cleverness and the grace and finish it displays, the charm of the melody, the richness of the instrumentation, the beauty of the harmony, and the thorough knowledge of the voice—perhaps this latter may account for its lapsing from the repertoire; for, understanding the capabilities of the voice, he wrote music to show its best qualities to good advantage—to show off qualities now neglected and not possessed by the majority of modern singers. He was born in 1797, and died in 1870.

GIOVANNI PACINI

Of two composers who have never been done justice to in England—indeed one is quite unknown here—some larger account may be welcome—Giovanni Pacini and Errico Petrella; though, if genius always met with its proper recognition, it would be unnecessary to say anything about Pacini. At one time his music was very popular in Italy, and though "Saffo" has been played nearly everywhere with varying success, he is now, on this side of the Alps, quite forgotten.

It has always seemed strange to the present writer that his music has not lived, for it possesses great qualities. Perhaps it falls between two stools; it lacks that element which would make it popular with the mass of opera-goers—it is just a trifle too severe—and on the other hand, though Pacini was a learned musician, like most Italians, he never made enough display of that learning—or neglect of it—to please the ultra-artistic, the Transcendentalists and what not. Not properly appreciated at the time he wrote, his music is now out of fashion, and nothing is so killed by a change of fashion as opera.

He had a great predilection for the classic drama. Anything connected with Greece or Rome fascinated him, as the titles of his operas show—"Niobe," "Gli Ultimi Giorni di Pompei," "Medea," etc.*

He succeeded very well in depicting the classic atmosphere. Take for example "Saffo." What could be more suggestive of ancient Greece than those lovely intervals, beautifully harmonised, for the orchestra that precede Saffo's "*Quando mio caldo genio*" in the first *finale?* What could be more dignified or antique than the whole scene in the Temple in the second *finale?* Throughout there is a richness of colour and real grandeur. The last scene is magnificent—the last farewell on the

* When twenty-one years of age he wrote "La Sacerdotessa d'Irminsul"—not a lasting success—the present writer does not know the work, but by its name it should be on the same subject as "Norma."

Leucadian Rock, containing the impressive chorus, the lovely dialogue for Saffo, Alcandro and Climene, and the poetess's farewell song—that sparkling gem of Italian art "*Teco d'all' are au pronube*," sung ere she throws herself into the waves. The libretto is one of the best in the Italian repertoire, Cammarano for once doing his undoubted talents full justice. Nowadays, when novelties are so scarce, and when produced not very successful, as a rule, in this country, surely it would be worth while reviving "Saffo." Though classic drama is now all out of fashion, having something dignified and reserved about it, qualities with which, in Art, at any rate, this age does not sympathise—any commonplace, meaningless wrangle in every-day clothes being preferred at the theatre, if only the stagecraft be good—and this is even finding its way into opera.

Other of Pacini's works are noteworthy. There is a great deal that is noble and even terrible in his "Medea"—though it may not bear comparison with Cherubini's setting of the fearful story. His melodies are always highly original and peculiarly his own, but nowhere more so than in the *allegro* in the duet, Act I of this last-named work.

The orchestral portions of Pacini's scores are of considerable importance, though his instrumentation is in no way remarkable. He wrote, besides 80 operas, a host of other things—masses, cantatas, string quartets (one or two of which have real beauty), incidental music (including an overture and choruses to Sophocles's "Œdipe Re"), and several treatises on music. He was director of the musical institute at Lucca, and died 1867.

Errico Petrella is an example—many instances of which might be cited from painting and not a few others from music—of how talent, in the main essentially second-rate, will occasionally soar to realms the altitude of which is ordinarily entirely beyond its reach. The perusal of most of his successful works—for instance "Marco Visconti," which contains a fine outburst of storm music

—would never lead one to suppose him capable of writing an opera of such beauty as his masterpiece "Ione" (1858), three-fourths of which is, in the opinion of the present writer, very nearly as fine as any of the music of Verdi's second period, and as a whole far finer than "La Traviata," which has been played everywhere, and which everywhere keeps the stage.

"Ione" is, of course, founded on Bulwer Lytton's "Last Days of Pompeii"—a story so suggestive for music that one wonders it has not been used as a libretto more frequently. The beautiful novel has undergone treatment as hard as that dealt out to another famous work—perhaps the greatest romantic novel ever written—the "Bride of Lammermoor." Indeed the incidents of the story have suffered more castigation at the hands of the poet Peruzzini and the libretto has not the elegance and graceful form of Cammarano's poems. One redeeming quality it has, however—a quality which cannot be claimed for the "Lucia" libretto, except as regards Ravenswood—the preservation of the character of the persons in Lytton's romance. Petrella has entered most sympathetically into his subject, with the result that these are beautifully depicted in the music—the poetical Glaucus, the sweet, contemplative Ione, the dignified and sinister Egyptian; Nydia, too, is charmingly represented in her first little air, and even "jolly old Burbo" may be recognised as the same contented spouse of the gentle Stratonice!

Of many beauties in the work, let a few be mentioned.

The second movement to the overture "*Andante Maestoso*" contains something of the "glory that was Greece and the grandeur that was Rome"; the introduction is excellent, with its characteristic opening, the incomparable drinking song for Glaucus, Nydia's charming song, and the beautiful *stretto*. The first two movements of Ione's air are lovely, and so is the love duet in Act II—no one but Bulwer's Grecian poet could sing "*Dell Illiso sulle sponde.*"

The finest music is, however, unquestionably in the last act,

which contains the doleful and original march played as Glaucus is led to the arena—to be killed, as it is supposed, by the lions—and his air just before entering the arena—his farewell to the world and all he holds most dear in it—is so lovely a melody, and so intense in expression, that one wonders it can stay in the oblivion to which it has been consigned—outside Italy, for the opera is still played there. The passage, "*Ah, Ione! in terra ultima addio!*" has, when sung by a good tenor, drawn many a tear ere now. In the duet which follows for Ione and Arbaces the melody "*Ah perdonami!*" is lovely, as is Glaucus's "*Vieni alla Græcia!*" and the close of the work, the catastrophe which destroys Pompeii, is finely suggested by the simple music—all the more impressively perhaps because of its simplicity.

Though "Ione" made its way to America and achieved great success at the old Academy of Music in New York, in the hands of Mazzaleni and Gazzaniga, it has, to the best belief of the present writer, never been played in England, though it was promised in the year 1859. Like Pacini's "Saffo," it would be well worth reviving; and though it has not quite the solid worth of that work, it has more element of popularity in it. Founded as it is on one of the most beautiful stories in English literature, it seems a pity that it should not be known here.

Petrella must be ranked as a follower of Verdi in his second period. He had not quite the same force, nor did he ever write pieces of such undoubted greatness as the "Rigoletto" quartette, but at his best he possessed rather more feeling for beauty. Like Verdi, at times one feels a lack of that elusive but unmistakable quality, "style," though like the greater master again he atones somewhat by his intense earnestness.

He was born at Palermo in 1813, and his most successful operas are "Le Precauzioni" (comic), "Marco Visconti" (1855), "Ione" (1858), "I Promessi Sposi" (1868)—at the first performance of which he was called before the curtain twenty-seven times—and "Manfredo" (1877). He died at Genoa in 1877.

FREDRICO RICCI

One more name and this appendix must close.

Fredrico Ricci was born at Naples 1809, and studied there at the Collegio (as mentioned in Chapter III). His operas attained a brief popularity in Italy and some of them crossed the Alps, without, however, any great success. They were pretty well extinguished by Verdi's music; indeed it is chiefly as a precursor of Verdi that he deserves mention. Chorley wrote of his music: "There is an inkling of the new effects in Signor Ricci's music. . . . The same rude noise in the instrumentation under pretext for passion, the same violence in breaking the phrases of the show music for the prima donna by jerks and sharp cries, of pushing the animation onwards by the use of unisons and syncopations, etc." It would seem quiet enough *now*. Among his best works are "Corrado Altemura" (1842), and "Griselda" (1847), which was somewhat of a failure in spite of much excellent music—for example, the charming and characteristic introduction in the first act. Ricci also had a hand in his brother's "Crispino e la Comare."

For some years he was the Musical Director of the Imperial Theatre at St Petersburg. He died at Conegliano in 1877.

There are many other works of the period that might be mentioned were this a fitting place to do so, all containing beauties worth studying. Musical history is full of their names. It is its saddest attribute that so many beautiful and pleasing works should be lost to the world through ignorance, prejudice, and carelessness.

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